

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Transformers

Dr. Scott Dudley

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Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, 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.² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Transcript:

Well, hello, Bell Pres. My name is Scott Dudley. I'm the senior pastor here. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you for making us part of your Sunday. It's great to be together this way. The scripture reading comes from Romans Chapter 12, if you want to follow along. And it says, "Therefore, I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will." So Holy Spirit ask that you use these next few minutes to help us understand that that passage of scripture help us know how we live out of it. Help us to be transformed by it. Pray this in your name. Jesus. Amen.

Well, a couple of weeks ago, I told you that I recently had cataract surgery. So cataract is this kind of yellowish cloud haze thing in your eyes, that makes it hard to see, but it also kind of tints everything, this yellow, green kind of yuck. Just cause that's what you're seeing through, but it happens so gradually over years that you don't notice that it's happening. So first they fixed my left eye and then a week later they fixed my right eye. And in that intervening week, I was constantly doing this right? Because it was kind of fun to see what things actually look like, what colors actually look like with the fixed eye, as opposed to what they look like with the unfixed eye. So for instance, I could see that our bathroom sink at home was actually white.

I just thought it had been this yellow, dirty color for, I don't know, like 10 years. I could see how blue the sky was. When I looked in the mirror, I realized I have a full head of hair and I look like Bradley Cooper. And if you can't see that, it just means that you have cataracts too. And you need to get that addressed. You get the point. The point is sin makes everything, it puts this yellow ugliest tint to everything and it

happens so gradually that we just get used to it. Just like I got used to my eyes used to the broken relationship, used to the bad habit, used to the bad attitude, used to the bland life.

But when Jesus removes that stain, we see the greater things are possible for us and greater things are possible through him for our world. Courage in hard times, better relationships, meaning, purpose, joy, healing for our culture. Even if you have failed, fallen and faltered, even though there's division and injustice and all kinds of problems in our world right now in a pandemic, you are not stuck. And our country is not stuck. Jesus rose from the dead. And if he conquered death, that means that he can conquer your dying hopes, your faltering energy and our nation's crippling ills. Greater things are possible.

And the verses I just read say, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And in the original Greek, a word for transformed is [foreign language 00:03:18], from which we get metamorphosis like a caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. The message version translates it this way. Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you just fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Unlike the culture around you always dragging you down to its level of immaturity. God brings the best out of you.

So here's the thing, you and I, we're being formed by something. Your friends, culture, Hollywood, we're being formed by something and what's informing your mind is forming you. Do you spend more time on Fox news or MSNBC than you do hearing from God and prayer and scripture and worship? If so, those things are forming you more than Jesus is forming you, but make no mistake. You and I are changing. Change is one thing that never changes. We are changing. The only question is what direction? What's the trajectory? Are we being conformed to our culture or are we being transformed to be more like Jesus and bring healing to our world?

So what I want to do, let me pick just these two versus a part kind of little bit phrase at a time so we can understand how we go from being caterpillars to butterflies. Okay? It starts out this way, therefore in view of God's mercy.

Okay? That, that therefore is there for a reason. Therefore always means that what's come before is super important. And this is the so what of what's come before and what's come before is 11 chapters about God's love, God's grace, God's mercy. Our transformation starts with God's love. If it doesn't start with God's love, it's not going to be transformation because if it doesn't start with, God's love, we're going to see God as our enemy. And we're going to see his commands as restrictive of our freedom.

But if we know, and if we experience that God loves us. Then his commands are not meant to keep us from having fun, but are for our best because he wants the best for us. They are the operating instructions for a more meaningful life. Therefore, in view of God's mercy present. See, God can transform you, but first you have to present yourself to him and say, "I want to be transformed" because he's not going to force this on you. And the Bible is filled with people who presented themselves to God. And then God did through them way more than they could do for themselves.

Moses, his mouth was inarticulate, but when he presented it to God, his words freed the Israelites from slavery. Rahab was a victim of the sex trade, but when she presented herself before God, she became a courageous warrior who furthered God's plans. Esther was a powerless woman trapped in the harem of a tyrant King. But when she presented herself to God, her courage grew and she stopped at genocide. Greater things happen when we present ourselves to God and what do we present? Do we present our intellect? Do we present our soul? Do we present our theology? No, no, no, no, no. Present your bodies.

That's weird. Like that doesn't sound super spiritual, right? It doesn't say present our minds or our souls or our hearts or something spiritual sounding. Bodies? Really? This is important because in our Western post-enlightenment culture, we have turned faith into giving intellectual ascent to a set of theological truth claims.

But our faith is always embodied. It's a transformed way of living. The message version puts it this way. Take your everyday ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life and place it before God as an offering. Your going to school, going to store, go into work life, put that in front of God. Lord, take my mouth and use it instead of for lies and for gossip, use it to build other people up and to praise you. Lord, take my driving and help me drive in a way that brings peace, where there's often discord. Please, Jesus do not let me drive like Pastor Dudley. I can do better than that. It's everything. Present your bodies. Every part of your life, the Christian life is decidedly on spiritual. We follow a God who became flesh in Jesus. Our faith is lived out minute by minute in our bodies, by what we say by what we do.

Next, present your bodies as what? A living sacrifice. That doesn't sound good, right? Like I don't want to be a sacrifice. I don't want to be a living sacrifice. And as you heard me say before, the problem with living sacrifices is they keep crawling off the alter,

"Oh Jesus. I just want to do your will. I will follow you. I'll obey you. Just tell me what to do and I'll do it." "Okay. Well how about you go forgive that person that you're mad at and then you'll have the blessing of being free of bitterness." "Ooh, Jesus. No can-do because see, I'm super mad at that person. But other than that, Lord, I'm your living sacrifice. So other than that, what do you want me to do? I'll do it. Just tell me I'll do it." "Well, how about you admit that you're becoming kind of toxic because you incessantly talk about your politics, which you think everyone should agree with. But if you would just listen a little bit in conversation, then you'd receive the blessing of being less angry, having better relationships and you might learn something from the other side that makes you better informed." "Jesus, I'm not toxic. I'm right and they're evil. And I need to convince them. So other than the forgiveness and the toxic thing, Jesus I'll do anything you tell me to do. Just tell me, I'm your living sacrifice." We keep crawling off the alter.

But when we do, we miss the blessing of the transformed life. Present your bodies as living sacrifices. This is your true and proper. And the Greek word there is [foreign language 00:09:28], from which we get logical. The most logical thing you can do is to present yourself to the God who can transform you. This is your true and proper worship because worship is more than what we do here on Sundays. This is important. This matters. This should be part of our life. But worship is also bigger than that. It's what we do every day. It's what we do in our going to work, going to school, going to the store life. That's also worship, right? It's presenting ourselves to God to be his person wherever we go so that we will not conform to the pattern of this world, AKA our culture, but will be transformed by the renewing, ING, when ING endings, that means ongoing.

It's not a one and done this transformation is an ongoing process and it takes time. And perfection is not the goal. Progress is the goal. And that just takes time. A tadpole does not become a frog instantly. There's no instant frog formula, right? Transformation takes years. And we get transformed a little bit at a time, right? And then we snap back to the bad habit and we sort of backslides, but then we kind of go forward again. But God's mercies are new every single morning and he is patient and he keeps working with us. So that even with the kind of two steps forward, one step back, the trend line is progress.

And sometimes the breakthroughs in our transformation seem so small, right? Like it can take a long time for someone to move from saying, "I am an addict." For instance, to saying, "I'm a person who has an

addiction. And I am deeply loved by God." That may take a long time. And it may seem like such a little thing. But that shift is actually the key that unlocks everything and progress starts to grow faster after that. Renewing ongoing process of what? The renewing of what? Our mind. Let me tell you what that does not mean. That does not mean we know more things, that does not mean we've taken more notes and more sermons, that does not mean we've heard more pastors parse more over Greek verbs. That's not what mind means in the Bible. Heart and mind are used interchangeably, right? So it's kind of not just intellectual knowledge, not just heart knowledge, it's both together, this mind heart thing. But bigger than that it's also our mindset, our worldview, because our worldview determines a lot about how we live. So when you change your mind, you change your life.

In the middle ages, sailors wouldn't sail West from Europe because they thought the world was flat. Actually scholars knew it was round, but the popular mythology was, it was flat. They'd fall off the edge. Plus it was unknown, right? So here be monsters was on all the maps. So instead they would sail around Africa to get to Asia. Their worldview determined their actions. And it's the same with us. Our worldview determines how we live and our worldview is formed in a million ways. Movies, television, social media, friends, culture, all send us these messages constantly. We just get you an hour a week. The rest of the time we're being bombarded by our culture, right? It's the purpose of life is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Sex is the most important thing there is. Buying things will make you very, very, very happy.

And unfortunately, often, our worldview changes our faith more than our faith changes our worldview. So for instance, in our country, a big church is thought of as a successful church. Okay? That is nowhere in the Bible. That is in zero places in the Bible. Does it say a big church has a successful church that has way more to do with American capitalism than it has to do with anything in scripture, right? Whoever captures a larger share of the Christian market is winning. That's our culture, shaping how we understand our faith, right? And often we just assume that these things are true and then they impact our faith. God wants me to be happy, right? No, that is not in the Bible. That's nowhere in the Bible. God wants you to be whole, God wants you to be Holy, God wants you to have joy that transcends your circumstances. But this idea that God is there to maximize my life plan. That is 100% American culture shaping our faith, rather than faith shaping our worldview.

When my kids were growing up, every Saturday morning, I'd take them to breakfast to be able to spend some time with them. And I remember this one time when my youngest, she was about five years old, fascinated with a credit card. I used to pay the bill. So when she asked, I kind of explained. I said, "Well, we use this and then it records how much we spent. And then at the end of the month, we pay off the bill, the entire bill. So we don't accumulate interest." I know she was only five, but you know, learning these lessons early on is really important. So I explained it to her and she said, "Well, I want to be a credit card person when I grow up." And I said, "Why?" She said, "So I can have all that money."

And then a few minutes later, she said, "Dad, do teachers get paid money?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Who gets paid more credit card people or teachers?" And I said, "Well, that would be the credit card people." And she said, "Well, then I want to be a credit card person." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "So I can have all that money so I can buy an RV." RV at five? Like where does that come from? Right. Like the point of life is to buy an RV? I mean, I assure you my wife and I have never, once wishfully spoken the letters R and V together in the same sentence ever in our lives, right? It's just like it was in the air and it infected my little five-year-old. We are all being formed by something. The question is, are we being conformed to our culture or transformed to have the mind of Christ?

But as we pray and hear from him and read scripture, and as we learn from other people in community, all of that gradually over time, it doesn't happen instantly, we are being transformed bit by bit to be more like Jesus. And a good place to start with this would be to join an online, all in small group. And they start this week, not too late to join a great way to grow in our faith and be a little more connected to each other in this pandemic. And that's important because when you change your mind, you change your life.

Recently heard about a guy in his thirties that he was so obsessed with his career and his entire self-esteem rested on his career and would rise or fall depending on his career success or failure. And he said, my mind would always drift to work when I was praying, but I never had the problem of drifting into prayer when I was working. And then after a reorg, he found himself doing a job he hated with people, he didn't respect. And so that got him wondering, what was that all about? And so he, he started reading scripture. He started reading some books, Christian books on work, and he changed his view of work. Now he sees his job as a way God's going to give him those challenges to mold him into the person God created him to be and use him in that office to bring God's healing by doing things like doing performance reviews differently. So it's really about developing employees rather than punishment and reward, helping the company be more ethical, things like that. And now he likes his job way better because his self-esteem isn't resting on it.

He changed his worldview, he changed his mind, and that changed his life. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And then, then there's a promise. Then there's a promise. It says, then, then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good pleasing and perfect will. This transformation is very practical. It's not theoretical. As we are being transformed, we will know better and better what to do in any situation because we will have internalized God's worldview. And wouldn't that be nice? Like, especially this year when everything is so topsy turvy, and it's just hard to know what to do this year, right? It's just such a crazy year. I recently saw a post that said if 2020 was a math problem, it would be like this, you're going down a river, two miles an hour, and your canoe loses a wheel, how much pancake mix would you need to reshingle your roof? That's kind of 2020, right? Like this makes no sense at all. And here at the church, we face this all the time.

So many meetings we start with, "How do we do X in this COVID time?" Right? When can we have people back in the building for worship? How do we do that wisely, knowing that no matter what we do for a while anyways, the vast majority of you are still going to be online and it's hard to do online and in-person at the same time well. How we mix the sound, where we preach the sermons from, we're doing lots of stuff to help make these online services more engaging. Once you got people in the room, all of that changes, state guidelines keep changing. That doesn't help. We need different equipment to even try to do this well, but it's back ordered like everything else these days. And we're working on all of that, we're working on it. Because we know we want to be together. I want to. I miss you very badly.

And we're going to talk more about this on our vision night on October 6th. And I hope you come, cause we're going to talk about this and the future of the church and all of that. And there's information online about vision night. My point is this, all of us, everyone right now in our world is having to make difficult decisions for which there is no precedent. You know, the Bible will tell you how to make an Ark out of gopher wood, how to bring down city walls by singing, but not one word on online worship. But I know where those decisions start: with those of us in leadership, sitting at Jesus' feet, presenting ourselves as living sacrifices and being transformed more and more to have the mind of Christ, which may not give us the exact answer to our question, but it will give us the values, vision, and worldview by which to make those decisions.

And then, as we are gradually transformed, as we understand God's will better, then we become agents of transformation in the world, which is what we see in the rest of Chapter 12. Everything that follows these two verses is about the ways God uses us to bring his healing to the world.

The chapter goes on to say things like honor one another above yourselves, as far as it depends on you live at peace with everyone. Think how much better our divided angry culture would be if every Christian did just that, that one verse, right? Because we would be listening as Christians, listening to each other, not to agree or disagree, not to argue, but to understand, which would save our country from all of this division. It's got some folks wondering, are we headed toward another civil war?

We could avert that if we start listening, if every Christian just started listening to each other, I mean, in some cases we are using the exact same words, but we mean completely different things. So for instance, the three words, Black Lives Matter to some people that means a Marxist organization and riots in the name of that organization, to other people they don't even know there is an organization by that name, to others those words communicate hope that their pain is seen, that their pain is heard, that they do indeed matter, to others, it's a phrase that says to people of color, "I'm with you, I'm listening, I care." We're using the exact same words, but we mean really different things by them. But if every Christian was being transformed to listen, to understand, we wouldn't always agree. We wouldn't, but at least we would understand each better. And that would bring healing.

This chapter also says that when we are being transformed, we will be joyful in hope, patient in affliction. Wouldn't that make our lives better? It says our love will be sincere, which means our relationships would be better.

Last year, when I was in Greece with a team of people from this church, working with Muslim refugees, we met a man that I'm going to call Abraham who is from Iran. And he paid some smugglers to get him and his family to Greece. And they put them in a rubber boat, but the boat crashed along some rocks, not too far from the shore in Greece. Abraham fell into the sea, along with his eight year old daughter, his wife and their three week old baby. Abraham managed to get his daughter and the baby onto the shore, gave the baby to his daughter while he went back in to help his wife get to shore, which he did only to discover that his daughter was crying and said, "I lost the baby."

So Abraham went back into the water. It was night, it was March, it was cold. Finally saw a flash of white, it was the baby and a white blanket floating on a piece of the boat and the baby wasn't breathing. But Abraham managed to resuscitate him, got to shore. Eventually they found their way to a Christian ministry that we support that helped give them food and get him settled. And all of that. However, Abraham was very anti-Christian. And one time this Christian ministry did a retreat to help people know more about Jesus and Abraham went on that retreat to argue against Christianity and to keep people in that retreat from becoming Christians. But all those Christians, they just kept loving him and helping him and serving him.

And when he got home, what he'd heard bugged him. Like he couldn't shake it. The God of love, who doesn't demand that we serve him, but instead came in the person of Jesus to serve us and to die for us. He'd never heard of that before. And the Christians were loving him and welcoming him in Jesus' name. And he started to read the New Testament to try to prove it wrong. But instead, on every page of scripture, he found Jesus, who was filled with love and compassion and courage and strength. And so eventually he became an all-in. And I mean, all, all, all-in follower of Jesus. At which point, his extended family threatened to kill him because you don't do that in their culture. And his wife said, "Great. We

survived Iran. We survived the boat ride. The baby survived. After all of that, now you're going to get us all killed because you went and became a Christian."

However, gradually, she began to see a changed man. Not all at once, but gradually, he started to treat her better because he was reading the Bible about how and having his mind transformed about how we're called husbands are called to love their wives the way that Christ loves the church. He was helping her with the chores and with the kids, he was less angry. He was filled with courage. I mean, he had a death threat on his head and he continued to follow Jesus. He started helping other refugees. Then one day, the mom was talking to their daughter, trying to convince her not to become a Christian. And the daughter said, "But I want what dad has. He's a different person. He's more joyful. He's a better dad. I choose the faith that changes people." And now everyone in that family, including the wife are all-in followers of Jesus and they are working to help other refugees.

In view of God's mercies, which he experienced through other Christians who welcomed him, he is being transformed. Now all of this took years, right? And he makes progress and then backslides and makes progress again, just like all of us, but he is being transformed. And through him, God is transforming the world.

The good news of Jesus is this: Jesus loves you just as you are and not as it should be. And he loves you not to leave you the way he found you, but to transform you and then through you bring healing to his world and all of us can use some transformation. So ask the Holy Spirit to help you be less conformed to our culture and be more transformed by Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to show you how he wants you to use you to transform where you live, where you work, where you play and where you learn.

We see ourselves and each other and the problems in our world through sin, stained eyes. But when we are being transformed, we begin to see what God sees: the hope, the possibilities, the transformation, the new life and the new world that can be. You are not stuck in the same old patterns with the same old people in the same old places, in the same old ways. Our country is not stuck. I refuse to give up on me. I refuse to give up on you. I refuse to give up on this region, that is my home. I refuse to give up on this country, that I love so very much when so much transformation is possible. When we're not conformed to our culture, but are being transformed through the power of Jesus, then greater things are on the way.

So Jesus, thank you for that. You are the God who changes us inside out. And Holy Spirit, I ask that this week you help us cooperate with that. Show us the ways that you are changing us. Show us the ways you are making us more like you. We absolutely cannot do this on our own, but through your power at work within us, we know we can change. And through us, we know you can change the world. So do that, Jesus. And we will give you all the glory. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Please Read Romans 12:1-2

1. Name, where you were born, and share briefly why you decided to do an All In Group?
2. What stood out the most from the sermon this past week?
3. What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
4. What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?
5. In light of what we've learned (application):

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- How might God want us to apply this to our own life and the lives of the community this week?
- Who needs to hear this message/good news?