

ALTARED STATE "COME TO THE ALTAR" ROMANS 12:1-8

People prepare for the future rather than the past. In fact, preparing for the past makes no sense, which is why no one pins their career hopes on jobs like telemarketer, travel agent, librarian, and word processor—jobs that *USA Today* reports will not exist in 2030. These jobs are destined to join the elevator operator, bowling alley pinsetter, and gas station attendant in the dustbin of occupations.

Like these jobs, the present age is passing away. Paul refers often in his letters to "this age" (1Co 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 4:4), "the present age" (Eph 1:21; Tit 2:12), or "the present evil age" (Gal 1:4); he also refers to "the coming age" or "coming ages" (Eph 1:21; 2:7; 1Ti 6:19). Moreover, he suggests that this age is not long for this world. He refers to Christians as those "on whom the culmination of the ages has come" and indicates that we have received the promised Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19) with whom we are "sealed until the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30). Believers have been raised with Christ, and so we live "a new life" (Ro 6:4)—which means the life Christ now lives, following his resurrection, is ours to live now, before our resurrection. You might say the age to come has already appeared in that the god of this age has been defeated and as the writer of the book of Hebrews puts it, we "have tasted the powers of the coming age" (Heb 6:5). One commentator explains: "Paul often uses the phrase 'this age.' He believes that, while believers live in this world and this age, the form of this

world is passing away. It is foolish to conform oneself to what is obsolescent and on the way out . . . Paul is not calling for believers to abandon this age, but to live in it while not being 'of' it" (Ben Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 286). The believer who conforms to the ways of this world is like the person aspiring to be a town crier. There's no future in it.

This Week's Core Competency

Spiritual Gifts – I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Your giftedness and your spiritual giftedness go hand in hand. You are gifted by God from your birth. You have talents and abilities that are all your own. You may be artistic, athletic, unusually bright, fascinated by science, a people person—whatever. It's your "divine design." Bill Hendricks traces each person's design back to Psalm 139. He writes, "Psalm 139 makes it clear that God designs people from the womb. It says that God sees the person's 'unformed substance,' which indicates that a person begins in the thoughts of God before s/he ever takes form. In other words, God thinks us up before He brings us into existence. And when He brings us into existence, He uses His own hand to form us. Not that God has literal hands. But the imagery is of a craftsman weaving an intricate tapestry. The point is that a human being is not just a random collection of protoplasm, but rather a handcrafted work of God. The word 'ordained' in the next-to-last line merits attention: 'In Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.'

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If all theology is grace, all ethics is a matter of gratitude.

– Ben Witherington III

The Hebrew word translated 'ordained' is *yatsar*, which means 'formed' or 'fashioned.' The idea is that our lives ('days') have been given a particular form or shape by the Creator. Perhaps a useful English synonym for *yatsar* would be 'designed.' God has designed us from the womb" ("Introducing Discover Your Design," 3).

You are spiritually gifted by God from your new birth. Spiritual gifts are abilities that you are given when you are born again. They may be related to and complemented by the talents and abilities you have from birth, but they aren't given to everyone—only to those who believe. They are given by Christ and bestowed by the Spirit (1Co 12). Lists of spiritual gifts are found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28, Ephesians 4:11, and Romans 12:6-8 where Paul urges believers to put their spiritual gifts to work. Your "divine design" plus your spiritual gift or gifts constitutes your giftedness.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 12:1-8

1 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.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Cf., another translation

So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. 2 Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.

3 And because of God's gracious gift to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you. 4 We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. 5 In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. 6 So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; 7 if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; 8 if it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully. (GNT)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 1.

* Circle "mercy" in v. 1.

* Bracket "offer your bodies" in v. 1.

* Circle "living sacrifice" in v. 1.

* Underline "holy and pleasing" in v. 1.

* Bracket "true and proper worship" in v. 1.

* Circle "conform" and "transformed" in v. 2.

* Bracket "pattern of this world" in v. 2.

* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 2, 3.

* Box "by" indicating *means* in v. 2.

* Circle "faith" in v. 3.

* Box "just as" in v. 4 and "so" in v. 5 indicating *comparison*.

* Double underline the 7 different gifts mentioned in vv. 6-8.

* Bracket "in accordance with your faith" v. 6.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Explain the *relationship* of Romans 12–16 to 1–11 as indicated by "therefore" in 12:1.
2. Paul *urges* his readers in verse 1 but *commands* them in verse 2. Why the "soft sell" in verse 1?
3. Explain *what* believers (you) are to offer God and *why*.
4. It doesn't make sense to "conform to the pattern of *this world*" or "*this age*." Why so?
5. What does it take to determine God's "good, pleasing and perfect will?"
6. Assess yourself in the light of verses 1-2. What do you see that is *encouraging* or *discouraging*?
7. Describe the *problem* Paul addresses in verse 3.
8. Explain the *comparison* in verses 4-5.
9. **Discussion:** Talk with others about your gifting and place in the body of Christ.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Paul's epistle to the Romans takes a major turn in 12:1, signaled by "therefore." On this shift from the indicative to the imperative, one commentator writes: "Every reader of Romans is conscious of a distinct break in the train of thought as he moves from 11:36 to 12:1. The theological exposition (or argument) centering around the problem as to how sinful man can be put into right relationship with God is over. But there is more to be said, because when man is made right with his Maker, he needs to know what difference this makes in his relations with his fellowmen. He needs to know what is expected of him and how to apply his new resources to all the situations confronting him. This last main section of the Epistle is designed to meet these needs (cf. Eph 4:1)" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 10:126). In the simplest of terms, chapters 1–11 address Christian *belief* while chapters 12–16 address Christian *behavior*. Clearly, the second section is integral to the letter and its central purpose; it is not an appendix, a "last-minute" addition unrelated to the theological heart of the letter. Paul's exhortations in chapters 12–13 contain injunctions regarding Christian conduct in general, and in 14:1–15:13 deal with specific matters affecting Christians in Rome, which all Christians face.

The first paragraph of chapter 12 (vv. 1-2) opens with an appeal. Although he had the authority to command his readers to offer themselves as "sacrifices, living, holy and pleasing to God," Paul "urges" them instead. Why he does so is implied by the words "in view of God's mercy" (v. 1). Knowing that the insights we gain through discovery are more valuable to us and that we're more likely to act on them, he invites his readers to reflect on the great mercy of God, which he explicates in chapters 1–11, confident they will conclude that offering themselves makes perfect sense. In verse 2, he uses contrast to make his point, telling his readers outright, "do not conform to the ways of this world," rather "be transformed," namely, "into the Lord's image" (2Co 3:18; cf., Rom 8:29) "by the renewing of your mind" (v. 2). The use of the *passive*, "be

conformed," implies transformation is God's work—done in cooperation with us. The *present* tense implies that transformation is an ongoing process—the process we go through to become like Jesus. This spiritual formation process is fueled by the progressive "renewing" of our minds, which leads increasingly to seeing things as God sees them and to discerning God's "good, pleasing and perfect will" (v. 2).

The second paragraph (vv. 3-8) opens with a warning to readers against thinking too highly or too lowly of themselves. In the previous chapter, Paul warns Gentiles as a group, "do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches," namely, Jews in general and Jewish Christians in particular (11:18). Of course, individuals in the church, whether Gentile or Jew, need to hear the same kind of warning. Instead of thinking too much or too little of themselves, they are to think "with sober judgment," as the NLT puts it, "measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us" (v. 3). This sober judgment recognizes that believers in Christ form one body, and like any body the body of Christ has many individual members, all of whom are essential to the functioning of the body. Each member is essential because each member is gifted, and God uses the giftedness of each member to transform every other member. One commentator writes: "Diversity, not uniformity, is the mark of God's handiwork. It is so in nature; it is so in grace, too, and nowhere more so than in the Christian community. Here are many men and women with the most diverse kinds of parentage, environment, temperament, and capacity. No only so, but since they became Christians they have been endowed by God with a great variety of spiritual gifts as well. Yet because and by means of that diversity, all can co-operate for the good of the whole. Whatever kind of service is to be rendered in the church, let it be rendered heartily and faithfully by those divinely qualified, whether it be prophesying, teaching, admonishing, administering, making material gifts, sick-visiting, or performing any other kind of ministry" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 227).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Offer yourself as a sacrifice to God—living, holy and pleasing to him—which entails thinking of yourself with sober judgment and exercising your spiritual gift with gusto.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Offering oneself to God as a living sacrifice—is this something done once or repeatedly?

Are you more inclined to think more than or think less than you ought to think of yourself?

How would you describe your gifting and place in the body of Christ?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **therefore** "Furthermore, *oun*, the connective 'therefore,' means that what Paul says in 12.1 is based on what he has argued previously. It is a conclusion based on the preceding arguments. So he can be saying 'in light of what we have argued in chs. 1-11 about the compassion of God, I appeal to you to present yourselves to God in a form and sort of worship toward which our logic or arguments have been pointing" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 285). "'Therefore' must be given its full weight: Paul wants to show that the exhortations of 12:1-15:13 are built firmly on the theology of chaps. 1-11" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 748). "Paul's dogmatic teaching is misunderstood if it is not seen to require ethical action, and his ethical teaching cannot be grasped if it is not recognized that it rests at every point upon the dogmatics" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC, 230).

v. 1 **offer your bodies** Cf., "offer your very selves" (NEB). "The point to be emphasized, however, is that [*soma*] denotes not just the person, but the person in his corporeality, in his concrete relationships within this world; it is because he is body that man can experience the world and relate to others" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38b, *Romans 9-16*, 709).

v. 1 **living sacrifice** Or "a sacrifice living, holy, acceptable to God." Paul qualifies the sacrifice that we offer with our bodies with three adjectives: living, namely, "one that does not die as it is offered but goes on living and therefore continues in its efficacy until the person who is offered dies;" holy, namely, one that "involves a being 'set apart' from the profane and dedicated to the service of the Lord;" and well pleasing, namely, one made in obedience.

v. 1 **true and proper** Cf., "reasonable" (NKJV, NET), "rational (logical, intelligent)" (AMP). "This self-offering is our 'reasonable' or 'logical' worship (cf., 1 Pet. 2.2, 5). Here the Jerusalem Bible is helpful with its paraphrase: 'worship worthy of thinking beings.' Worship, that is reflective of what we know and recognize to be true of God and what God has done. Humans are capable of being rational and recognizing that God is worthy of worship . . . As Wright suggests, Paul may mean the worship to which our logic or arguments have been pointing" (Witherington, 285; see Moo for other possible interpretations, 752-53).

v. 2 **conform, transformed** The verb "conform" could be *middle*, "do not conform yourselves" (TEV) or *passive*, "do not be conformed" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) or simple *active*, "do not conform" (NIV, REB, NJB). The verb "transformed" is *passive*, "be transformed." "The two processes are viewed as going on all the time, a continual renunciation and renewal" (Harrison, 128). "The tense of the verb is again present; and in this case the fact that the renewing of the mind is a continuing process justifies us in thinking that Paul uses this tense to stress the need for us to work constantly at our transformation" (Moo, 756).

v. 2 **pattern of this world** Lit., "this world" (ESV) or "this age" (YLT). "Paul has used *aion*, essentially a time word, meaning 'age,' but it has much common ground with *kosmos*, the more usual term for 'world.' The believer has been delivered from this present evil age (Gal 1:4), which has Satan for its god (2 Cor 4:4). He lives by the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5), but his heavenly calling includes residence in this world, among sinful men, where he is to show forth the praises of him who called him out of darkness into God's marvelous light. He is in the world for witness, but not for conformity to that which is a passing phenomenon (1 Cor 7:31)" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 10:128).

v. 3 **faith God has . . .** Cf., "measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us" (NLT). Is faith or gifting the measure? "If faith is, then, basic Christian faith as given equally by God to all, then the 'measure of faith' could refer to this shared faith as the standard by which Christians are to regard themselves. Our faith is the measure. On this view God has not given a different measure to each Christian but has given to each Christian the same measure . . . 'Measure of faith,' then, should be compared in this paragraph not to the many different 'gifts' that God distributes to believers, but to the one common grace from which they stem (v. 6). It is that faith . . . that Paul here highlights as the standard against which each of us is to estimate himself" (Moo, 761; *contra* Dunn, 721-22).

v. 6 **prophecy** "NT prophecy could include predictions of the future (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10-12), but this was not its essence. More broadly, rather, NT prophecy involved proclaiming to the community information that God had revealed to the prophet for the church's edification (see esp. 1 Cor 14:3, 24-25, 30). The truth revealed by the prophet did not come with the authority of the truth taught by the apostles, for the prophetic speech was to be scrutinized by other prophets (1 Cor. 14:29-32)" (Dunn, 765).

v. 6 **your faith** "Prophesying, Paul is saying, is to be in 'right proportion' [or right relationship] to faith. As in the similar phrase in v. 3b, the question here is what 'faith' means . . . We are inclined to side with Cranfield, who argues that faith refers, as usual to basic Christian faith and that 'the *analogia* of faith' is essentially the same as the 'measure of faith' in v. 3: the standard implied in one's own belief in Christ." (Moo, 766-67).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

I'm an experience parent. I love taking my kids places—zoo, museum, road trips. I'm all in! Honestly, I'm not very good at using my imagination or playing. Pretty entertaining when I tell my kids all summer to get off technology, use their imagination and go play. And you can forget crafts. Glitter is a hard no in my world. I would love to have a word with the person who invented slime. Now, my husband on the other hand, he's amazing at crafts, playing Legos or dolls, and projects. He rocks the school science fair like a boss. It took me a while to get comfortable with him being better at some things than I am. I'm the mom; I should be able to do all the things the very best. Once I came to terms with the fact that his strengths would supplement my weaknesses, our parenting began to flow in a beautiful rhythm. Romans 12 is a great reminder that God has given each of us different spiritual gifts that not only further the kingdom but also our home and family. Do you know your spiritual gifts? Your spouse's? Take a moment this week to pay close attention to the way God has gifted you both. Encourage your spouse as they use their spiritual gifts in the home. Watch what happens to the rhythm of your home as you parent to God's glory. I'm praying blessings for your family this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 12:1-8

1. What does worship mean? What will you do to worship today?
2. What are the two ways to think of yourself in verse 3? Which way do you think of yourself most often?
3. Romans 12:6-8 lists seven different spiritual gifts. List the gifts and describe how they can be put into action.

What Do You Think

How do we get spiritual gifts?
Why do we have them?

What R U Going To Do

What do you think your spiritual gift is? How can you use your gift this week at home, school, church?

Core Comp

Spiritual Gifts – I have been given special abilities to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

Romans 12:1 – *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.*

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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