

Getting What You Want: 4. Putting It All Together

Romans 12:1-2

November 25, 2018

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So... What do you want? All of us have gotten what we wanted only to realize it wasn't what we really wanted. Academically, relationally, financially, we pursued what we wanted, we thought that was the answer, the way to contentment and satisfaction and once we got there, we were still empty. It wasn't at all what we really wanted. And we've learned in this series that's because what comes naturally is in conflict with what we value. So, to get what we really want, we must discover what we really value.

Last week, we looked at Stephen Covey's exercise: What do you hope others will see in you? How will you be remembered? That's my greatest challenge when it comes to funerals – no one wants me to read someone's resume. You wouldn't want more than that at your funeral. How do you want to be remembered? Last week, I described my realization – already at least 2/3rds of the way through my life – and I wondered if I've pursued what I wanted only to miss what I value because I never took the time to figure out what I really value. And, I don't think I'm the only one. Most people never take the time to figure this out. Here's the scary part: there's no do over. We can't go back, but we can go forward.

I'm a Dad. Let me share something with the Dads in the room, especially those who are younger than me, because I wish I had known this from the beginning. At certain points along the way Amanda would remind me that if I wanted a relationship with my children later in life, I had to work at it now – not once they became adults, but every step along the way, even when it was hard, even when they didn't seem to want one with me. Dads, you will want the respect of your adult children. Your son or daughter may be 10 today, but you will want their respect when they are 20 and when they are 40. You will want your adult children to be with you when they don't have to be with you. And what you do when your children are 3, 5, 11, and 16 will determine that. And if you lose their respect along the way (chasing a thing or a fling), you may never get what you really want. It's easy to let the immediate wants distract us from what really matters. But when you know your Values, you won't settle for what's right in front of you – but what's ultimately important.

Another way to ask the question is What does God want - not from us, but for us? What does God want for you? Like a parents wants for their children, what does God want for you? And Paul gave us a list: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.** (Galatians 5:22-23) He called these the "fruit of the Spirit." It's what you were created for.

A lot of people carry around a false narrative: "This world can give me what I really want." In fact, this month, the retail world has been trying every-which-way to get your attention and persuade you that you can find happiness and meaning and love through the use of your credit card. In fact my credit card company has been sending me email wanting to increase my credit limit and loan me all sorts of money that I don't have. "Don't settle for a 55 inch screen when you could have a 75 inch screen. It's what you really want!" Our culture is designed to distract you from what really matters. A 75 inch screen isn't wrong as long as you can afford it and it does not distract you from what you value. But if you think life is all about upgrades, you will never get what you really want.

In our scripture for today, Paul gives us something to do. In the first 11 chapters of his letter, Paul describes God's grace and mercy to all of humanity. And then in chapter 12, he says: **Because of God's mercies...** Because God is merciful, I want you to do something. Then and now, a lot of people do not equate God with mercy. A lot of people think of God as judgment, waiting to catch you doing something wrong, looking for some reason that you are not acceptable. But Paul is saying, God is merciful. Earlier he says, it is God's kindness that will lead you to change your heart and life. (Romans 2:4) God's kindness wears us down until you throw your hands up and say, "How can you love me in spite of all I've done?" Because God is for. God wants what is best for you. **Because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God.** Paul is writing to Christians in Roman. They knew about sacrifices. The Romans and even the Jews sacrificed animals as an act of worship. So when they heard sacrifice, Paul wanted them to imagine climbing up on the altar and sacrificing themselves instead of animals – not literally, but symbolically –to present your bodies – that is, your behavior, to sacrifice your will. Like giving God a blank check without knowing what God will ask you to do. Who would do that?

Paul knew this would be hard, maybe even impossible. And so he says: **This is your appropriate priestly service.** In other words, in view of all that God has done for you – the God who created you, the God who loves you unconditionally, the God whose mercy and acceptance is limitless – in view of all that God has done for you, the appropriate response is to surrender and to serve. **Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world** We've seen patterns – it's how clothing is made; it's how furniture is constructed; it is how food is prepared. There are ways things are done – a pattern or a mold. Don't be pressed into the mold of this world. Don't be distracted. There is more to life, and God has a plan for you.

Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed The Greek word is metamorphosa from which we get the word metamorphosis. There is a process, and if you will engage in the process of being transformed over time, something will happen to you. Some of you went to high school and then college and maybe graduate school. You were in a process. We live in this world and over time we are pressed into a mold of this culture, it is a process that shapes who we are and what is important to us. That's life in this world. Paul is saying, I want you to be transformed. And how does that happen?

Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds Paul knows we can't flip a switch and automatically change our behavior. So he's saying, don't even focus on your behavior. Don't start there. I want you to change the way you think. When we see as God sees – when we see relationships as God sees – when we see money as God sees – when we see opportunity as God sees – when we see family as God sees – when we see our job as God sees – when we see our time and ability as God sees, we are more inclined to do what God wants us to do. When we renew our minds and begin to see as God sees, we are more inclined to do what God wants for us.

Many who grew up in the church became disillusioned by the church because they were taught what they were supposed to do – what behavior they were to do and when they asked why, the response was because the Bible says so or that's just the way it is. But Paul would say – use your mind – ask questions, because when you understand why, you are more inclined to do. Transformation begins with renewing your mind. And if you try to do without thinking and seeing the world as God sees it, the result may be obedience for a while – but it won't last. Years ago, I met with a young woman who wanted me to do her wedding but not in the church and not with any Christian language in the ceremony. She came to me because I knew her grandparents and she knew it would be important to them if I did the ceremony. But why no reference to

Christianity. She told me her story. She grew up in a church where she was told what to do, what to think, and what to believe and as she got older she asked questions – she kept asking why and she was told not to ask questions. She was an intelligent young woman, and eventually, she became so frustrated by the fact that she was told not to question that she walked away from Christianity. If she could not ask questions, if she could not engage her mind, she didn't want any part of religion. If you try to do without thinking and seeing the world as God sees it, the result may be obedience for a while – but it won't last.

Maybe you went to church camp or a youth mission trip or you had an experience one Sunday in worship and so you made a commitment, but two weeks later it was barely a memory. It didn't stick. It's because you had an experience but didn't change your thinking. Paul says, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. It's like refinishing furniture. I inherited an end table from my grandmother, but when I received it, the table didn't look like this. The finish was dark and crumbly. The legs were wobbly. There were scratches and water marks on the top. It had seen a lot of use. For as long as I could remember it was in my grandmother's living room – so I was happy to have it. But if we were going to keep it, the table needed work. I took off the old finish, sanded the wood, glued the legs, and put on a new finish – and by the time I was done, it looked brand new. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed – how? Renewing your mind – and how is that done? Take off the old and put on the new.

The old is what comes naturally. The new is what you value. The old is what you want now. The new is what you really want. The old is the mold that the culture keeps trying to squeeze you into. The new is what God wants for you. The old is things. The new is character. The old is all the stuff that makes you feel good for a while. The new is what life is really about. As you take off the old and all the false messages you have heard, the lies that have not worked for you, lies about money, lies about sex and relationships, lies about friendship – and as you renew your mind and see as God sees, you will be far more incline to do what God wants for you. And Paul says, here's the payoff: **so that you can figure out what God's will is** – As you begin to renew your mind, you will be able to discern God's will – and what's that? **so that you can figure out what God's will is – what is good and pleasing and mature.** What is satisfying and grown up and what you really want. God has a desire for you and as you figure it out, you will see what you really want and what God wants is closer than you realize.

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is – what is good and pleasing and mature. (Romans 12:1-2)

So, what do you want? The only way to get what you really want is to discover what you value – which is what God wants for you. And the process to figure out what God wants for you? It is called renewing your mind. It begins when you change your way of thinking. Take off the old and put on the new and begin seeing as God sees. Then you will know God's will – and how to get what you really want!

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of November 25, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Eternal and loving God, how grateful we are to know you and to be known by you. We want to see as you see. We want to pursue what ultimately matters, not conform to the pattern of this world. Transform our minds so we can better know your will. Give us the courage to choose what you want for us. Amen.

Monday, November 26

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 16:1-14, 37

They brought in God's chest and placed it inside the tent David had pitched for it. Then they brought entirely burned offerings and well-being sacrifices before God. When David had finished offering the entirely burned offerings and the well-being sacrifices, he blessed the people in the LORD's name and distributed a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a raisin cake to every Israelite man and woman.

David appointed some of the Levites to serve before the LORD's chest in order to remember, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, Israel's God: Asaph was the leader, and Zechariah his assistant; also Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel with harps and lyres; Asaph sounding the cymbals; and the priests Benaiah and Jahaziel blowing trumpets regularly before the chest containing God's covenant. On the same day, for the first time, David ordered Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the LORD.

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make his deeds known to all people! Sing to God, sing praises to him; dwell on all his wondrous works! Give praise to God's holy name! Let the hearts rejoice of all those seeking the LORD! Pursue the LORD and his strength; seek his face always! Remember the wondrous works he has done, all his marvelous works, and the justice he declared—you who are the offspring of Israel, his servant, and the children of Jacob, his chosen ones. The LORD—he is our God. His justice is everywhere throughout the whole world.

Then David placed Asaph and his relatives, together with Obed-edom and sixty-eight of his relatives, to minister there continually before the chest containing the LORD's covenant, following the routines required on each day.

Observation: King David had jubilantly brought back the sacred Ark of the Covenant to Israel's capital. (If you don't know the story of how they lost it, it's in 1 Samuel 4.) Then David offered "entirely burned offerings and well-being sacrifices before God," and "blessed the people in the Lord's name." He also gave Asaph and his family a new job: making thanksgiving a permanent part of Israel's worship. (At least 13 of the psalms bear the heading "A psalm of Asaph.")

Application: Chronicles was written after Israel came back from exile (1 Chronicles 9:1-2). David's story wasn't just past. It shaped the returned exiles' worship: To praise is "to thank" (16:4). What or who have you praised this past week? Are you comfortable praising your spouse, children, or co-workers, as well as your God? The next time you're sharing your feelings about a tough time you've gone through, think about making that an opportunity to share how you experienced God in that situation.

Prayer: O God, thank you for life in all its mystery and wonder. Thank you for the ways you've made yourself known in all parts of my journey. Thank you for loving me. Amen.

Tuesday, November 27

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 29:9-14

The people rejoiced at this response, because they had presented their offerings to the LORD so willingly and wholeheartedly. King David also rejoiced greatly. Then David blessed the LORD before the whole assembly: Blessed are you, LORD, God of our ancestor Israel, forever and always. To you, LORD, belong greatness and power, honor, splendor, and majesty, because everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you. Yours, LORD, is the kingship, and you are honored as head of all. You are the source of wealth and honor, and you rule over all. In your

hand are strength and might, and it is in your power to magnify and strengthen all. And now, our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name. Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly? Since everything comes from you, we have given you that which comes from your own hand.

Observation: As the end of his life and reign drew near, David invited the Israelites to join him in giving the materials Solomon would need to build the Temple in Jerusalem. The people's response (in a process a bit like our congregation's stewardship commitments) was much more generous than anyone had expected. Filled with joy, they thanked God for the privilege of giving!

Application: "Since everything comes from you," David said (or sang) in verse 14, "we have given you that which comes from your own hand." (See also Psalm 24:1.) In what way did David's clear view of the source and ultimate ownership of what he gave affect his ability to thank God for the opportunity to give? To what extent are you able to share David's sense that you are giving God back that which comes from his hand?

Prayer: Dear God, I join with David and sing, "You are honored as head of all ... you rule over all ... it is in your power to magnify and strengthen all." Amen.

Wednesday, November 28

Scripture: Psalm 33:1-12

All you who are righteous, shout joyfully to the LORD! It's right for those who do right to praise God. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre! Sing praises to him with the ten-stringed harp! Sing to him a new song! Play your best with joyful shouts! Because the LORD's word is right, his every act is done in good faith. He loves righteousness and justice; the LORD's faithful love fills the whole earth. The skies were made by the LORD's word, all their starry multitude by the breath of his mouth. He gathered the ocean waters into a heap; he put the deep seas into storerooms. All the earth honors the LORD; all the earth's inhabitants stand in awe of him. Because when he spoke, it happened! When he commanded, there it was! The LORD overrules what the nations plan; he frustrates what the peoples intend to do. But the LORD's plan stands forever; what he intends to do lasts from one generation to the next. The nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom God has chosen as his possession, is truly happy!

Observation: While our vision can narrow to the confines of our own life and activities, in this exuberant song of thanks the psalmist looked to God's creating power and righteous rule. He invited all of God's people to join in thanking God for creating us, and for exercising ultimate rule over all that goes on in our lives.

Application: Most Bible translations start this psalm with the phrase "Sing joyfully" or, in the Common English Bible, "Shout joyfully." In The Message, Eugene Peterson paraphrased it as "Good people, cheer God!" Most of us feel comfortable cheering the Vikings or Gophers at their games. But many of us find it awkward to cheer God. How and when do you get into the spirit of this psalm and "cheer God," feeling and expressing exuberance, thanksgiving and praise?

Prayer: God of all creation, I'm so thankful that your love has drawn me into the family of people you call your own. Empower me to live out my gratitude by extending your love to others in my sphere of influence. Amen.

Thursday, November 29

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:3-8

By his divine power the Lord has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of the one who called us by his own honor and glory. Through his honor and glory he has given us his precious and wonderful promises, that you may share the divine nature and escape from the world's immorality that sinful craving produces. This is why you must make every effort to add moral excellence to your faith; and to moral excellence, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, endurance; and to endurance, godliness; and to godliness, affection for others; and to affection for others, love. If all these are yours and they are growing in you, they'll keep you from becoming inactive and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Observation: Peter said that God's forgiveness and divine love give us the inner power we need to escape the world's immorality. Similar to the fruit of the Spirit that Paul provided in Galatians 5, Peter listed positive virtues God offers us. Let God build these things into your life, Peter said. They will bring you life, shielding you from an "inactive and unfruitful" existence.

Application: Peter called on us to have these positive qualities "growing in you." Which of these qualities do you find already present in your life? Thank God for them! Then ask God to guide you to see clearly which of the qualities are missing, or not growing. As you become aware of those places, work with God to grow an increasing measure of that virtue, making your life ever better.

Prayer: O God, please add your divine power to my efforts, so that my life may continually grow in the positive qualities that you have promised will give me the truly good life. Amen.

Friday, November 30

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

This is what I'm saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood can't inherit God's kingdom. Something that rots can't inherit something that doesn't decay. Listen, I'm telling you a secret: All of us won't die, but we will all be changed—in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet. The trumpet will blast, and the dead will be raised with bodies that won't decay, and we will be changed. It's necessary for this rotting body to be clothed with what can't decay, and for the body that is dying to be clothed in what can't die. And when the rotting body has been clothed in what can't decay, and the dying body has been clothed in what can't die, then this statement in scripture will happen: Death has been swallowed up by a victory. Where is your victory, Death? Where is your sting, Death? (Death's sting is sin, and the power of sin is the Law.) Thanks be to God, who gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Observation: The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth that we can have total confidence, even when we face death, that "the worst thing is never the last thing." Paul's words about the resurrection body weren't a science lecture, but a ringing statement of faith. Like Paul, we can count on Jesus' victory over death, and thank God for the gift of eternal life.

Application: In his commentary, N. T. Wright suggests: "Death has claimed a victory, and the pagan world shrugs its shoulders and acknowledges it. The Jewish world at its best declares that God remains the creator and will do a new thing. The Christian message is that he has already done the new thing in the Messiah, Jesus, and that he will do it for all Jesus' people through the Spirit's power. In that new thing death and decay will be gone, swallowed up

forever.” In short, what we hope for and trust in has already happened! Pause and thank God for the gift of hope rooted in the history of Jesus, your Savior and friend.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, so much in the world tugs me toward disbelief and fear. Thank you for the eyewitness testimony in the Bible to your life, death, and resurrection, and for your Spirit in my heart. I plant my hope firmly in the fact of your victory! Amen.

Saturday, December 1

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Brothers and sisters, we ask you to respect those who are working with you, leading you, and instructing you. Think of them highly with love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are disorderly. Comfort the discouraged. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Observation: “Give thanks in every situation” may sound like denying the reality of whatever tragic circumstances we face or any of life’s deep hurts. But Paul wrote these words to Christians in a city where a mob had tried to arrest and snuff out the message he preached (see Acts 17:1-10; see also 2 Corinthians 11:23-30 for Paul’s summary of the kind of life he’d led). Paul meant what he wrote - “every situation,” including very hard times as well as good times. At all times, he said, there are reasons to thank God.

Application: Paul was not telling us to stop feeling whatever we may be feeling. Telling your spouse not to feel angry or your child not to feel bad seldom leads to a happy evening at home. But behaviors can be called for. And that’s what Paul is doing. You may not be able to give thanks for all of the things that happen, yet you can give thanks in everything for the confidence that God is always present and is always at work for good. When have you found God at work in your life in the midst of a bad or painful situation? What hard situation are you facing right now that gives you the chance to act on Paul’s words?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, whether my holiday has been filled with joy and warmth, with sadness or loneliness, or with a whole mix of feelings, thank you for the freedom you are giving me to live a life of peace and trust because of you – whatever happens. Amen.