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 #4—It's Ok If You're Not OK

Be Renewed in Mind
Romans 12:1-2, Mark 8:22-25

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,^[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual^[b] worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.^[d]

What do you think about yourself?

If someone were to ask you to describe yourself, what would you say?
 Is it hard to think about,
 without also thinking about all the ways you feel you fall short?
 If so, you're not alone.

So many times, ***we are our own worst critics.***
 We can easily think of all the ways we fall short,
 the things we dislike about ourselves or our lives,
 or all the ways we wish we were different, right?

It's easy to judge ourselves.

As ***parents***, we can feel like we are failing our kids,
 like we could do more, say more, help more.
 We worry about what's going to happen to them,
 and what we could have done differently.

As ***employees***, we wonder what's around the corner,
 and whether we can handle it,
 whether we'll measure up.

Even as ***Christians***, we wonder whether our faith is strong enough,
 or our prayers are good enough, or our worship is right---
 especially when we compare ourselves to one another!
 Sometimes we assume God must be listening to someone else more, that their
 faith is stronger, you know how it goes....

Sometimes we take this a step further,
 and ***project our self-criticism onto God...***
 and we assume that God thinks poorly of us as well.
 We think maybe God is constantly judging us,
 or handing out punishment,
 or causing things to go wrong in our lives...
 We ask: What did I do wrong? How do I deserve this?

These verses in Romans, and this story of the blind man,
 are ***so powerful for us and the battle of our minds,***
 because they say something drastically different.

Paul says to the Roman church, and to us today:
Do not be conformed to this world.
 Wow.
 Talk about something we all need to hear ***as Christ-followers,***
 As ***image-bearers*** of God.

We live in a ***social media culture***—
 where everything appears a certain way, regardless of truth or reality.
 It distorts our view of the world, and ourselves.

The world is all about appearances.
 Social media is full of pictures of near perfect
 families, bodies, homes, cars, even food....
 regardless of what's really going on behind the photos, right?
 We seem to know that what we see, or read, is not always true—
 yet still we get sucked in,
 and find ourselves buying into the falsehoods,
 the pressure, the criticism of our lives.

Cyber-bullying is rampant for young people,
 but it exists for all ages because people feel emboldened
 by a near-anonymous public platform to spew hatred and vitriol.
 Ugh!

We constantly see messages about what we should look like,
 how we should talk, and dress, and work, and live!

We are also bombarded with **messages about what we need to have**.
 You need this.
 You really must have this, or you're nothing.
 A nobody.

The messages and criticism is exhausting and overwhelming, isn't it?

It can be defeating and depressing,
 if we spend too much looking at it, and taking it in as truth.
 Because it's not.

It can look like everyone else is doing ok. They are NOT.

None of us are totally ok.

And that's ok!

It's ok if you're not ok, because you know what?

We have a living, loving God,
 a Savior Jesus, a Holy Spirit living within us that loves us---no matter what.
 Our God loves us ***even in, especially in,***
 the tough, ***'not-ok' times*** of our lives.
 We don't have to put up a false front, or a happy face,
 We just be ourselves, no matter what.

In Sheila Walsh's book *It's Okay Not to Be Okay*, she has the greatest quote:
 She says that Jesus *'knows all our little quirks and personality traits, but the glorious truth of the gospel is that Jesus is in love with us right now, even though we are a crazy, mixed-up bunch.*

He sees us as beautiful.

Sheila Walsh, *It's Okay Not To Be Okay*, Baker: Grand Rapids, 2018, pg. 57.

Do you realize how true that is?

The story of Christian faith is ***a LOVE story!***

Between us and God—

a God who not only loves us, but a God who ***pursues*** us,
 who runs to meet us, even when we have wandered away from our faith!
 Talk about amazing grace!

We don't have to be ok before God,

or before the body of Christ, our brothers and sisters in the church!

We can be real, and vulnerable.

In fact, living as ***a real, vulnerable person***

leads to a much more fulfilling life!

Not a great Instagram photo,

But a real life.

I love the sociologist **Brene Brown**, for her TED talks and her books.

Her research is about vulnerability.

Which sounds weird,

until you realize that real life is found

when we are authentic and vulnerable.

It's found when we ***get ourselves into the arena of life***, even if we fail.

She frequently quotes Theodore Roosevelt,

and a speech he gave after leaving office as President in 1910.

*"It is **not the critic who counts**; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The*

credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena,

whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly;

who errs, who comes short again and again,

who spends himself in a worthy cause;

who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement,

*and who at the worst, if he fails, at **least fails while daring greatly,***

so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls

who neither know victory nor defeat."

Wow.

Imagine if we lived like that was true.

Imagine if we ***stopped the criticism*** of ourselves, and others,

and ***gave credit to those who are real, and vulnerable,***

those in the arena, trying to make the most of this challenge called life.

Hey--what if we realized the ***power of failing?***

It's all too easy to judge everyone from the comfort of a computer screen, or radio, or a television.

But credit does go to those

who are willing to be authentic, and vulnerable,

to those ***who fail, admit it, and get back up.***

The great news for us as Christians

is that we are never alone in the arena of life.

We always have our living God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, right beside us!
When we fail, they help us back up!

You know who else helps us—who can be on our side?

We can.

The body of Christ, the church.

What if we always had each other's back, no matter our faults and failures!

That's amazing grace too!

We are after all, the body of Christ here on earth,
called to live out the grace and love of Jesus—right here, with one another.

Brene Brown often talks about how life is not about pursuing perfection.

It's not about being 'right'.

It's about being real.

Being vulnerable—admitting mistakes, and shortcomings,

telling the truth about yourself, and the world around you.

Wouldn't that be a breath of fresh air?

God wants that for us.

Authenticity---not being conformed to this crazy world,

A world that says *look perfect*,

'never apologize', 'never admit failure', 'never show humility'.

God wants more than that for us-- new life, real life, for all of us.

But how?

Paul says we are to BE transformed.

He does NOT say we are to transform ourselves.

There's a big difference, isn't there?

Our ***tendency is to try self-transformation***, right?

Thus the plethora of self-help books and websites!

But this is not about our hard work and effort.

It's about ***allowing the Holy Spirit*** to work inside us,
to bring about transformation.

Which means---you guessed it----***SURRENDER.***

It means letting go of our lives,

the lives we cannot control anyway, and letting God be God.

The Greek word for transformed here is ***metamorphoo***, which is where we get our word ***metamorphosis***. And we picture a caterpillar emerging from the cocoon, completely transformed into a beautiful butterfly.

In fact, the butterfly is an image for Christian living,
and being a new creation in Christ,
because transformation is about being completely different and new.

This word for transformed is only found here in Romans 12,
and in the Gospel accounts of the ***Transfiguration*** of Jesus,
and then by Paul again in ***2 Corinthians 3:18***
when he talks about how we will be changed for eternal life.

So, how are we transformed?

By the renewing of our minds.

Again, it's a ***passive*** phrase, meaning we don't renew our own minds.

It's something that the ***Holy Spirit does*** inside of us.

Again, we have to let go, and surrender.

We have to open our minds to the possibility

that ***God knows better about what needs to be in our minds!***

This Greek word for renewed is ***anakainosis***—***which means renewal, regeneration, and a complete change for the better.***

It is only found here and in Titus 3:5,

where it talks about the renewal of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The root word is found in 2 Corinthians 4:16, which we heard a few weeks ago. Paul says there: ***Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.***

So here in Romans, Paul uses two powerful words,

transformed and renewed, to talk about a ***complete change***.

Not just a face-lift, or a partial change.

Not just something that looks good on the outside.

He is talking about a real change of who we are.

So, is a ONE time renewal and transformation?

I don't think so—not this side of heaven.

Think about the ***story of the blind man*** that we heard today.

Jesus brought healing to him in two stages.
His eyes were opened,
and then his sight was fully restored when Jesus touched him again.

What if that's true of our hearts and minds?

What if our minds are opened by the Holy Spirit,
and then when we get to eternity, they are renewed forever?
What if that story reminds us
that we must ***allow the love and grace of God to transform and restore us---
again and again?***

Sheila Walsh said something else really powerful in her book,
She says, "***Only an internal transformation will truly change external
behavior. Every battle begins in our minds, not with our behavior.
We can behave a certain way and remain unchanged.
If we want to change how we act, we have to change how we think.***
Sheila Walsh, *It's Okay Not To Be Okay*, Baker: Grand Rapids, 2018, pg. 66.

***Do you agree—that changing our minds changes our behavior,
not the other way around?***

Think of it this way.

We all have an ***internal story. A narrative.***
If you believe in your mind that you are a failure,
You will ***often live that out***, in big and small ways,
Maybe in work, or eating, or drinking, or failing relationships.
Because when we have a ***deep-seated story inside,***
we tend to live it out on the outside.

So what can we do?

How do we change our thinking? And our story?
What if we have to keep going back to Jesus for healing?
What if we have to keep going back to God, saying—
here you go, you get to handle this, not me?

And what if we have to start telling ourselves a different story?

Humans are storytellers.
Our stories dictate who we are, and how we see the world.
And some of our stories are just ***wrong.***

Listen to some of those wrong stories:
I'm so busy I'll never catch up.
Or, I'm such a loser, I'll always have bad luck.
Or, I just keep on failing, I'll never catch a break.
Or, I'm such a bad person,
God will never answer my prayers,
God doesn't walk beside me,
God doesn't care for people like me.

What is your story?
Do you need a different story?

In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says this:
we take every thought captive to obey Christ.
 What does that mean?
 It means we ***test every thought against the truth of Jesus Christ!***
 And what is true?

Truth is from God's Word, the Bible.
 Taking every thought captive means
 we test every thought against the truth of the Bible!
Not what the world says is true, not what we think is true!

In ***Streams in the Desert*** this week, it said this on September 26:
We must choose between facing our feelings,
or facing the facts of God.
Our feelings may be uncertain....as shifting sand.
God's facts however, are as certain as the Rock of Ages Himself—
Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Listen to this ***truth from Romans 8:5-6:***
⁵ *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* ⁶ *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

What if we accepted God's eternal truth?
 The truth that Jesus loves us, and died for us,
 And gives His grace to us—no matter who we are, or what we've done!

How do we do that?

We have to spend time in the Bible—as much as we can!

Reading, memorizing.

And maybe even posting those truths all around us—

in our car, on our mirror, at our desk, on the dinner table.

That's the idea of the ***faith jars for families*** we have here.

And, we have to pay attention to what goes into our minds.

If it's all horror movies and reality T.V....well, you might get a mess from that.

If it's all social media...you may get a lot of guilt, shame, jealousy or worse.

If it's all the gossip and the company of negative people

Well, you get the idea.

We have to pay attention to what goes in,

Because it affects how we behave, and how we live.

When we do that, our minds can be renewed, and our lives transformed!

***We can let God change our thinking,
so that our behavior actually changes!***

This is one reason I'm such a strong proponent
of therapy or spiritual direction.

I think EVERYONE can benefit from this!

Because none of us have our act together,

and all of us could use ***a place to confess, be real, and find support.***

***I go to my Pastor/spiritual director, who is a therapist,
at least once a month.***

It was a promise I made to this church when I was hired,

and it is probably the best thing I do for self care.

How are you seeking this kind of support?

If you need some referrals, just give me a call!

***I also am a strong proponent of medication and psychiatry,
when that need arises.***

Meds for our brains can be just as important
as meds for the heart, or cancer, or diabetes.

Unfortunately, ***there is still a strong stigma against admitting and treating mental illness.***

But the truth is, many of us,
in this church have struggled with mental illness,
like depression, or anxiety, including myself.

And there is no shame in admitting that, or treating it.

God gave us the miracle of modern medicine to treat our brains too!
Sometimes mental illness is situational,
other times it's a chemical imbalance.
Either way, it's important to face and treat.
I've seen the power of this, in myself, and my kids.
It might be the same for you.

You know why we do this?

Why we seek a transformed self through a renewed mind?

For Freedom.

Jesus wants us to have freedom.
Freedom from ***pain***---mental, emotional, and physical.
Freedom from the ***stigma of being real***, and authentic, and broken.
And Freedom from ***isolation***.

The truth is you are not alone. Not ever.

You have a living loving God beside you at all times,
and when you are in this family of faith,
you have a community of people who have your back.
We are real, vulnerable, imperfect people,
And we are here to help one another.

One of the ways we help each other is simple: ***We listen to one another.***

Really listen, not just to talk later, or 'fix' the other person.

We just listen.

You know one of the ***best suicide prevention actions is to listen?***

There's also something called ***QPR***—

which stands for ***question, persuade, and refer.***

We should listen, and **question** people who are depressed---
what are you feeling? Do you feel like hurting yourself?
Do you have a plan for that?

We should Persuade them to contact a hotline, or a professional.
 And **Refer** them to those professionals who can offer the help that is needed.

This is why there are **mental health resources in the bulletin today**.
 Take them, and use them.

September is suicide awareness month.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in people under 35.
 It is a leading cause of death among veterans, and seniors.
 Someone in the world commits suicide every 40 seconds.
 45,000 Americans die this way, every year.
 123 Americans are dying, every day.

If a small jet crashed killing 123 people every day,
 you can bet we'd be doing things differently—but we aren't.
 Some of these suicide victims are our loved ones,
 members of this church, and this community.

***And yet, we allow the stigma of mental illness
 to keep us from listening to one another,
 and seeking help, even when we need it ourselves.***

Even though 80-90% of people who seek therapy
 and or meds for depression get better!

<https://save.org/about-suicide/suicide-facts/>

Let's DO better. Let's BE better.

Friends, hear ***the Good news of the Gospel*** today.

Let's be transformed by the renewing of our minds—

And allow the Holy Spirit to work in us!

Let's surrender, so we can find freedom, and new life!

And let's ***pay attention, not just to ourselves, but to one another.***

And to that, all God's people said, Amen.