

The Altar alters life

by Warren Wiersbe

This sermon emphasizes the crucial decision between being a conformer or a transformer in life, based on Romans 12:2. It highlights the importance of having a worshiping heart, a yielded body, a renewed mind, and an obedient will to become a transformer who impacts the world around them.

Scripture: Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Isaiah 6:8, Acts 13:2, John 4:23, Romans 11:33, 2 Corinthians 3:5, Philipians 2:13

Topics: "Transformation", "Renewed Mind"

Description

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Transcript

The great decision that each one of us has to make is not do I stay home or go overseas, do I get a job or go into some job that we call full-time Christian service. That's not the big decision. The big decision that you and I have to make grows out of what Paul wrote in Romans 12 verse 2. Am I going to go through life being a transformer or a conformer? Once you have made that decision, everything else falls into place.

We find out whether God wants us to stay or go. We find out what he wants us to do. We find out where he wants us to serve.

Not everybody is called into full-time Christian service, although we're all called into full-time Christian living. And so the great question I have to answer is, am I going to be a conformer or a transformer? And you say, well, what is the difference? Well, it's rather obvious, I think. Paul wrote, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

A conformer is a person whose life is controlled by pressure from the outside. A transformer is a person whose life is controlled by power from the inside. Conformers are sacrificed to the world.

Transformers are living sacrifices who change their world. Someone says, well, I'm a student in school. Fine, you can be a transformer.

That's what Daniel was. They gave Daniel a new home, gave him a new address, gave him new clothing, gave him a new name, gave him a new curriculum and tried to give him a new religion. And Daniel

purposed in his heart he was going to be a transformer and not a conformer, and before long he was running the country.

Joseph was sold as a slave, went to Egypt, became a worker in Potiphar's home and made up his mind he was not going to be a conformer, he was going to be a transformer, and before long he was second in command of the home. He was lied about, put into prison, and before long he was second in command in the prison. And then he became second in command of the whole land.

I'm not saying that each one of us as transformers will become president or prime minister. What I am saying is this, many of us do not make much of a difference where we live. If we were not there, nobody would notice it.

That wasn't the way it was with Deborah, or David, or Paul, or C.T. Studd, or D.L. Moody. A group of men were sitting in a barbershop in Northfield, Massachusetts many years ago, and they were talking as men sometimes do in barbershops, and a man walked in, said nothing, sat down, waited for his turn, but the whole atmosphere of the barbershop changed, and the conversation shifted, and after the man had been attended to and left, a stranger said, who was that? And the barber said, oh, didn't you know, that was Mr. Moody. So the big decision we have to make now, am I going to be a transformer, whose life is controlled by power from within, so that around me things change, or am I going to be a conformer, whose life is controlled by pressure from without? J.B. Phillips translates it, do not let the world pour you into its mold, which raises the question, how do I become a transformer? How do I become a living sacrifice? Now, God does not call all of us to be dead sacrifices, martyrs.

We've heard today about many who have laid down their lives. God may call some of us to do that, but in this particular context, Paul is saying, it's one thing to say, Lord, I will die for you if necessary, it's quite something else to say, where I am, with all the pressures that are there, I'm going to live for you, a living sacrifice. My Lord up in heaven is a living sacrifice.

Now, he's not offering himself again and again. No, that was settled, once and for all. For by one offering, he has perfected forever them that are sanctified.

No, no, no more sacrifice, but he's a living sacrifice. He bears on his body the wounds of Calvary. Isaac was a living sacrifice.

He went with Abraham to the top of Moriah, and there he willingly put himself on the altar and willingly faced the night. To all intents and purposes, he did die and was raised from the dead, spiritually speaking. And from that point on, he was a living sacrifice.

In order for me to be a living sacrifice, nor for you and me to be transformers, there are four essentials that must be present in our life. They're very simple. Paul spells them out very simply.

Romans chapter 11, verses 33 through 36. The first essential is a worshiping heart. When we preachers are going to preach on dedication, we start with Romans 12.1. Paul didn't start with Romans 12.1. In Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11, Paul wrestles with some of the deepest theology found anywhere in the New Testament.

He discusses election. Mr. Moody used to pray, Lord, save the elect and elect some more. He discusses predestination.

He discusses sovereignty. He discusses topics that divide the saints today. He discusses the future of the Jewish nation.

He discusses evangelism. He discusses missions. He doesn't answer all of our questions.

Campbell Morgan used to say, when all of my attempts at exegesis, Bible study, fail, I worship. And Paul gets to the end of this long section of profound theology, and theology turns into doxology, and he ends up singing. I don't recall ever hearing any of my theology instructors sing.

But I'd be a little bit suspicious of somebody who taught theology who couldn't turn it into song. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing out. Paul begins to sing a hymn of praise to God, because that's the first essential for being a transformer, a worshiping heart.

You say, why? Keep a marker in Romans, and go back to the book of Acts, chapter 13, verse 1, the beginning of the missionary movement. Dr. Luke lists for us a group of prophets and teachers who were ministering in the church at Antioch. At the beginning of the list is Barnabas.

At the end of the list is Saul. But notice verse 2. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. It does not say, while they were attending a missionary conference.

Nothing wrong with missionary conferences. I speak at them often. It does not say, while they were reading a missionary prayer letter.

I read missionary prayer letters. It says, while they were worshiping God. I wonder if today one reason why we don't have very many transformers is because we have very little worship.

Here were a group of teachers and ministers who were worshiping God. They were praising and praying and worshiping God. And the Holy Spirit of God, in the midst of that worship, said, I want Barnabas and I want Saul, and they're going to go out and reach the Gentiles.

A worshiping heart. That's what happened to Isaiah. We aren't told specifically, but we have every reason to believe that Isaiah was in the temple.

When he had that vision, recounted the account of which is given in Isaiah 6. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord high and lifted up. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

And while he was worshiping God, Isaiah discovered he was a sinner. And God sent the coal of fire to cleanse his lips. And then God said, who can I send? Who will go for us? And out of that worship experience, Isaiah said, here I am.

Send me. Now go back to Romans chapter 11. And let's find out why a worshiping heart is preparation for a transforming life.

You see, in verse 33, when you have a worshiping heart, you don't try to explain God's ways. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out.

Every once in a while, someone stops me and asks me a Bible question. And I will sometimes say, I don't know. And then they look at you as though you are some kind of a fool.

Here you are teaching the Bible, preaching the Bible, writing books, preaching on the radio. Surely you know the answer. I say, I'm sorry, I don't know.

I have a confession to make to you. I do not live on explanations. I live on promises.

There's much about this life I can't explain. And there's much about the pathways of God I can't explain. Oh, I've read the books that explain them.

And that's one reason why I can't explain them. Now, it isn't wrong for us to think God's thoughts. It's not wrong for us to try to dive into the depths of God's wisdom.

But let's remember, we know in part. And so when you have a worshiping heart, you don't try to explain God's ways. You just accept them and do them.

And then in verse 34, he says, when you have a worshiping heart, you don't try to change God's mind. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? We have. We've told God what he ought to do.

In our praying, we say, now Lord, do your perfect will. But I think it ought to be this way. But when you have a worshiping heart, you don't do that.

You just get lost in the will of God and the wisdom of God. You get lost in the glory of God. And you don't try to give God advice.

Verse 35 says, when you have a worshiping heart, you don't try to buy God's blessings. Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? Now, Lord, I'll do this if you'll do that. That's not a worshiping heart.

Now, Lord, I'll make a bargain with you. That's the way Jacob lived. He always had some scheme up his sleeve.

And Paul says, that's not the way it works. When you have a worshiping heart, you don't try to explain God's ways. You don't try to change God's mind.

And you don't try to bargain your way, buy your way into God's blessing. And it finally ends up in verse 36, that when you have a worshiping heart, you don't try to steal God's glory. Where does ministry come from? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever. Amen. When I was in Youth for Christ many years ago, I learned a little principle that I think is still true.

If you can explain what's going on, God didn't do it. Oh, it's no wonder our church is succeeding. Our pastor is such a well-educated man.

Then how do you explain the early church in the book of Acts? They were untaught men. Nothing wrong with education. Learn everything you can, put it under the blood of Christ, and go to work.

Oh, it's no wonder that our ministry grows. We have such a good mailing list, really. If you can explain what's going on, God didn't do it.

So a worshiping heart is where we start. Long before I make any other commitment, I come and say, Father, I want to worship you. Lord Jesus, I want to worship you.

I'm not going to tell you what to do or how to do it. I'm just going to worship you. I'm concerned about one thing.

To him be the glory forever. That's the first essential, a worshiping heart. Then in verse 1 of chapter 12, Paul says, Therefore, having gotten our worship straightened out, now we can talk about some other things.

Therefore, I urge you, not I command you, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, the thing he's been talking about in chapters 9, 10, and 11, the mercy of God, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Now, we're continuing that worship.

We don't start, stop, start something else. No, we continue that worship. I have given God an adoring heart.

I'm lost in the wonder of his wisdom and his ways. And now I'm going to give to him a yielded body. That's the second essential.

Have you ever given your body to God? We have this strange attitude toward dedication, that it's something very spiritual, which means it's nebulous, it's foggy. It's like trying to put steam in an envelope and mail it overseas. It's like shoveling mercury with a pitchfork.

Dedication is just, here I am, Lord, and I feel so good. Paul says, let's get down to rock bottom, give God your body. I recommend that you study the physical side of being spiritual.

Sometimes I get phone calls from church officers or even ministers, and they say, we have a problem in our church. Now, what's the problem? Well, the trustees and the deacons or the trustees and the elders do not agree. I say, tell me what they do.

Well, the elders are in charge of the spiritual part of the church, and the trustees are in charge of the money. And my response is usually the most spiritual thing you can do in a church is handle your money properly. Who said money wasn't spiritual? Now, I'm not saying go home and rewrite your Constitution.

All I'm saying is when Paul got a missionary offering from the church at Philippi, he looked upon it as a spiritual sacrifice, a fragrance that went up, pleasing to God. There's no such thing in the Bible as sacred and secular, spiritual and material. The most spiritual thing I can do for God is to give Him my body and use that body the way He wants me to use it.

Now, if I continue on this track, I may meddle, and I don't want to meddle. I'm a visitor. And though I am leaving the country, the Lord willing, next Wednesday, I don't want to leave any enemies behind.

I will simply say this. We evangelical Christians are prone to criticize unbelievers for what they do to their bodies. And sometimes we are guilty of equally destructive habits.

Why does God want my body? Because God cannot get anything done without a body. When the Lord Jesus came to do the great work of redemption, He had to have a body. And so the Holy Spirit of God prepared a body for Him in the womb of Mary, and Jesus had a body, and He went about doing good.

He was not an ethereal kind of a spirit. They could feel Him. They could touch Him.

He was there. Now, He's gone back to heaven. He's left behind a spiritual body, the church.

The head is in heaven, the body is on earth, and that body is made up of people. We are members of His body. We belong to each other, and we need each other, and we affect each other, and we should minister to each other.

And God says, I want you to give me your body because I need a pair of hands to play the piano. I need some feet to go do some visitation. I need some eyes to plan a building.

I need some lips and a tongue to deliver a message. How is God going to get His work done if He doesn't have a body through which the Holy Spirit can work? God wants our bodies because our bodies are God's temple. He purchased our bodies.

He indwells our bodies, and this temple should glorify Him. Whether, therefore, you eat or drink or whatever you do, glorify God in your body. That Christ may be honored in my body, said Paul, whether by life or by death.

We sometimes quote that verse, man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. Friends, men do look on the outward appearance, and the outward appearance is important. God wants our bodies because our bodies are God's temples.

Our bodies are God's tools, Romans chapter 6. Don't yield the parts of your bodies to sin. Don't let sin take over your ears and your eyes and your hands and your feet, your stomach. Don't let sin use the members of your body.

Give the members of your body to the Holy Spirit who indwells you. Let Him fill you and empower you. Your body is God's tool, and your body is God's treasury.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 7, we have this treasure in earthen vessels. God's put the treasure of eternal life in an earthen vessel. Now he says share the treasure.

Well, how do you do that? You have to have a vessel. Many of you take medicine, I'm sure. I do.

I look forward to that day when I'll have a glorified body and won't even have to take glorified medicine. There just won't be any more. When I was in the hospital and they brought me my medication, I didn't care what it was in.

A paper cup, a plastic cup, didn't have to be a silver cup. As long as what brought the medication was clean and available, and that was the right medication. Now these earthen vessels that we have are weak.

These earthen vessels that we have are not the important thing to share with others. It's the treasure in the vessel. And God says, give me your body.

Have you ever done that? In fact, it's a good thing to do every day. When we wake up first thing in the morning and just simply say, thank you Father, you've cared for me all night. You've been awake, I've been asleep, thank you.

Now here's my body. By the way, if we got into that kind of a habit, it might help us to get up a little earlier and spend some time with the Lord. Early in the morning, the high priest used to go to the altar, take off yesterday's ashes, put on some fresh wood, take a burnt offering and give that burnt offering first thing in the morning.

And that's what I should be doing. First thing in the morning. Present myself as a living sacrifice to God.

Here's my body. It makes a difference what you do with your body the rest of the day. But it doesn't stop there.

A worshiping heart which leads to a yielded body, which leads to a renewed mind. Verse 2. Do not conform any longer 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. A renewed mind. Where did we ever get the idea that when you go to church or come to a conference session, you park your mind someplace else? That the Christian faith is anti-intellectual.

You don't think. I don't know about you, but my Christian life began with my mind. I had to change my mind.

I had to repent. I'd been raised in Sunday school. Every Sunday I was in Sunday school class.

My lesson completed to the last question. I was confirmed in the church and was not a believer. I bluffed my way through.

One year after my confirmation, I trusted Christ as my Savior, and the first thing I had to do was admit that what God said was right and what I thought was wrong. That's where the Christian life starts. The mind.

We hear a message. We have to think it through. It's not just the emotion.

The emotions are involved. No question about that. And the will is involved.

It's like getting married. In fact, Paul uses that illustration in Romans 7. He says we have been wedded to Christ, that we might bring forth fruit to God. My wife and I met at school, seminary.

Her last name was Warren. We were seated in a couple of classes alphabetically, and so it was Warren, Wiersbe, Warren, Wiersbe. And I got to know her, but I wasn't married to her.

And then over the years, we had some dates and got to know each other, and something happens in your heart as well as in your wallet. And finally, we went together for so long, I had to marry her for my money. But even though I had facts in my mind and feelings in my heart, I did not have a wife until one hot June day.

I said, I will. And she said, I will. And we wilted.

Now, salvation was that way. I knew so much about Jesus. In case you had feelings of fear in my heart, but I wasn't converted, then one day I said, I will.

But it started in my mind. When God wants to communicate, He talks to the mind. He wrote a book, and this book communicates to the mind.

Now, also to the heart. I know this. It's not like reading a textbook on chemistry.

It's like reading a love letter from home. I know all of this. But He communicates to the mind.

My mind is a part of the image of God, and God wants to renew that image in me. And therefore, He says, will you give me your mind? And will you allow me to renew your mind? Because some thoughts have gotten in there that shouldn't be there. I consider my mind to be something like a computer.

Only that is going to come out which I put in it. Therefore, I'm very careful what I put in it. I'm very careful what I watch on television.

Our set doesn't go on except to see the weather very often. I'm very careful about what I read and how I digest it. And by the grace of God, I try every day to spend time in this book so that in the amazing way that He does it, the Holy Spirit renews the mind.

You've had this experience. You're reading consistently through your Bible. Now, not just anywhere.

I meet these people who play Bible roulette. You know, they just open anywhere. You don't do that.

You read this book like you'd read any other book, consistently, carefully, systematically. And you say, has that verse always been there? I never saw that before. But there it is.

Why? God is renewing your mind. A worshiping heart, a renewed, a yielded body, a renewed mind. My mind controls my body.

As He thinks, so He is. And even the most humanistic psychiatrist would tell you, if you want to change your behavior, change your mind. This takes me back to a verse that haunts me.

I've quoted it so often. 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. We referred to this the other evening.

2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed, same word, into His likeness, all with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. When the child of God looks into the word of God and sees the Son of God, he is transformed by the Spirit of God into the glory of God.

That's why you read your Bible. The word transformed is the word transfigured. God wants us to have our own private transfiguration every day.

Oh, you won't go up on a mountain. Maybe you could. I couldn't.

There are no mountains anywhere in Nebraska. We admire anthills in Nebraska. Your own private transfiguration where you hear Moses, you hear Elijah, the prophets, you hear Jesus, you hear the voice of the Father, the glory of God, and that glory is not picked up on the outside temporarily.

That glory grows on the inside permanently, and we start reflecting that glory the way Jesus did, the way Stephen did, and we become transformers. If you want to be a transformer, it starts with a worshiping heart, which leads to a yielded body, which yields to a renewed mind. But don't stop there.

There's a fourth essential, an obedient will. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will. God does not have three wills.

God has one will. As I first enter the will of God, I say, hey, this is good. But then I realize I don't just do it because it's good.

That could be selfish. I do it because it pleases Him. It's a beautiful day in the life of a teenager when he graduates from, I'd better be good or my father will beat me to.

My father loves me. I want to make him happy. That's maturity.

It's a beautiful day in the life of a Christian when he says, I'm going to do what God wants me to do. It pleases Him. It makes my father's heart happy.

But you don't stop there. You discover how perfect it is. Not three wills, but I have a suspicion we grow in our appreciation of that will, an obedient will.

I'm encouraged by the fact that Paul tells us that we test and approve God's will. Now, it doesn't mean we have to go through all sorts of puzzles and mazes and enigmas to find the will of God. Mark Twain used to say, it's not what I don't understand about the Bible that worries me.

It's what I do understand. There are times when we wrestle about decisions. I know this.

All I can do is follow what Paul says. If I have a worshipping heart, I want His glory alone, a yielded body, a renewed mind, then I pray, I seek the will of God through the Word, through my Christian friends. I wait before Him.

I make a step. I've learned that if I make a wrong step, He'll stop me. Another way to translate verse 2 is, then you will learn by experience what God's will is.

It's not true here in the UK, but in America, our people love formulas. They love quick answers. They love the quick food, fast food, digests, quick answers.

You put money into a machine, push a button, out comes a soft drink. That's the way to live. In some parts of the United States, we now have drive-through mortuaries.

You don't have to get out of the automobile to go pay your respects. You just drive through, and there's the remains of the friend or loved one. It wouldn't be a loved one, you'd be in the mortuary, I suppose, but the friend.

I don't know how you sign the register. To me, it's a rather grave situation that we are now so unfeeling, we can't get out of an automobile and go in and hug somebody and say, I'm sorry, you've lost your loved one. But that's the way people live.

We have to have the fast food and the quick answers and the merchandise delivered right now, and people want the will of God that way. And so you can read books that give you five steps toward the will of

God, ten steps toward the will of God. And Paul is saying, learning the will of God is like learning how to swim.

You dive in. And occasionally, you sink a little bit. And occasionally, you swallow some water.

And occasionally, you flail around a little bit. But you're learning a lifestyle. Once again, it's like marriage.

The longer you live with somebody, the easier it is to read their mind. Isn't that right, men? And the longer we walk with the Lord with a worshiping heart, with a yielded body, with a renewed mind, the better we understand His ways and His promises. He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

The children of Israel knew what He was doing. Moses knew why he was doing it. And Moses was a transformer.

An obedient will. Now, you'll notice that Paul moves then into the church. He says, Evaluate yourself.

Find out what you can do. And get to work in the church. If you've got a gift, and you must have at least one, use it.

I was converted to Christ in my teens. And through a series of circumstances, was led to a church where somebody laid hands on me one day and said, Why don't you teach a Sunday school class? I said, I've never done it. Well, do it.

And lo and behold, discovered I had a gift of teaching. I can say that because I have no credit for that. You don't take credit for a gift.

John the Baptist said, A man can receive nothing except it's given from heaven. And I found myself enjoying teaching. Aha! Where'd that happen? In the church.

We are sheep, and sheep flock together. We are members of the body, and they stay together. We're stones in the temple, and we are linked together, cemented together.

We need each other to find the will of God. It's a dangerous thing when a person goes off like the Lone Ranger to do his own thing, and he's not under the authority of somebody else in obedient will. Paul says, Don't think too highly of yourself.

Don't overrate yourself. Rate yourself soberly. If you came to me and said, Would you manage the athletic ministry at our camp? I'd say, No.

I'm not an athlete. I know my gift. Don't be conformed to this world.

Let's just close on this note. What do you know about the world? Well, we know what John told us. Love not the world.

Oh, the world wants my heart. Love not the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Ah, but if I have a worshiping heart, I won't love the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh. Oh, the world wants my body.

Ah, but if I have a yielded body, I won't give my body to the world. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the world wants my mind. And all of the things you see in the world get into the mind and impregnate the mind.

And Paul says, Wait a minute. If you've got a renewed mind, the world won't stain you. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, that's the will.

Oh, the world wants my will. The world wants me to say, I will. There was a funeral in Lincoln, Nebraska a few weeks ago.

I did not attend it, but a friend of mine who was there told me about it. One song was sung at the funeral. The man was not a believer.

One song was sung, Frank Sinatra's song, I Did It My Way. One second after he died, God had his way. The world wants my will, but if I have an obedient will, then that pressure on the outside is counteracted by the power on the inside, and instead of being a conformer, I become a transformer.

What is a transformer? Somebody whose life is controlled by power from within. How does that transformation work? A worshiping heart, a yielded body, a renewed mind, and obedient will. Some years ago, on a rainy day, my wife and I drove to Northfield, Massachusetts to visit the grave of D.L. Moody.

I was pastoring the Moody Church. Thought I should go pay my respects to the founder of that church. Mr. Moody, as you know, was a great fundraiser.

He raised millions of pounds here in the U.K. to build various ministries here in this country, and didn't take that money back to America with him. But in America, he was a great evangelical pickpocket. In fact, he said, the epitaph on my tombstone should be, and it came to pass, the beggar died.

But it wasn't. You know what the epitaph is on his tombstone? Sure you do. He who does the will of God abides forever.

I stood there on that rainy day, that miserly day like you have up in Scotland, and I looked at that tombstone, and I thought to myself, that man is dead, but he's still winning souls. That man is dead, but he is still publishing books. That man is dead, but he's still sending out the gospel, because he was a transformer.

God may not make you and me into a D.L. Moody or an Amy Carmichael, but where you are in your world, you can be a transformer, a living sacrifice, changing things. We come, our Father, conscious of the great opportunity we have in our world where we live to make a difference. And as in Paul's day, so today, your Holy Spirit is looking for available people.

Forgive us that we have yielded to the pressures of the world instead of to the power of the Spirit, and grant that we shall be transformers wherever you put us. We are available, Father, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/GI8CG-EtPPY.mp4>

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