

## Romans 12:2

Week #9 in the Series "Whose Verse is it Anyway?"

Pastor David Woolverton & Dominic Tuttle

As we wrap up this message series on "Whose Verse is it Anyway", we thought we are going to do something a little creative. So, both Dominic and I are going to be doing dueling sermons. We've never done this before, so it'll be an adventure for both of us. We're taking the same passage of Scripture, and we're going to look at it from each of our perspectives. As we open the word of God, perhaps these verses and our reflections will speak broadly or specifically into your individual journeys. That is our hope and that is our prayer. And we believe that the Holy Spirit can do that for every one of us. So, as we prepare ourselves for the Word of God, would you join with us as we go before the Lord in prayer? Gracious Heavenly Father, we pray that you would open us up to your word and open your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this we pray in Jesus mighty name. Amen.

So let me launch with a question for you based on this passage of scripture. Do you personally have a mentor? Do you have a sense of what you're looking for in a mentor? How do you define mentors? A mentor is an individual who is providing guidance, someone who is not necessarily telling you how to do everything, but hopefully leading you along the right path. I would define mentors as individuals who are able to coach me in a wide variety of different parts of my life, coach me from the vantage point of they have been where I am wanting to go. Really what I'm talking about is where do I want to go in my faith journey? Where do I want to go in my health? Where do I want to go in terms of my relationships with my wife or my family? How do I want to deepen my walk in life? What is that element of my life journey that needs to grow and expand? And who out there has been where I want to go? And if they're willing to coach me on that, that's what I consider to be a mentor.

If you were to say, Dominic, how many individuals over the course of the last ten years have been mentors for you? How many people have spoken into your life that way? Probably about eight? I'm a little bit older than you. There is wide variety of what mentoring means that you sitting here, watching us online. You have the capacity to be a mentor. You are individuals who have been where someone else in your circle of influence is wanting to go. Hold on to that thought as we engage the Scripture, because we're going to come back to that in just a few moments.

We only had a few moments to review this passage, but when you looked at this passage of scripture for the very first time, what stood out to you, Dominic? The first thing that hit me was a paradigm shift. When we're reading verse two, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, what jumped out to me was that the world is broken. It's not good. It's not healthy. A lot of people are motivated by selfish ambition and desire. And consequently, the world we see around us has a lot of negative to it. But as followers of Jesus, we want to be like Jesus who was not like the world over and over and over, through the Gospels, we see Jesus. turning culture on its head, going completely against everything that was expected. He did not conform to the world and therefore to be transformed by the renewal of your mind. It's changing the way you look at things. It's changing where you stand, which

direction you're facing. There's a story that I immediately drew on from this. A story of a fresco in Italy and it's up above an altar, painted in the 17th century, I believe. It was often believed to be kind of an awkward painting. It was the Virgin Mary with infant Jesus on her lap and a couple of people in robes that you didn't really recognize around her. And all the people standing beside her, looked like they were just leaning towards you. They looked like they were about to tilt over on everyone. And the whole thing just felt wrong. And as one art critic was there studying it, he was fascinated by this confusion. Suddenly he looked and he had this flash of inspiration. He thought, this is a church. When this was painted, people weren't coming in here to stand up and critique the arts in a building - they came here to worship. This is an altar. He steps forward and kneels at the altar. And by adjusting his perspective and kneeling, the hills shifted from that perspective into the background, no longer the foreground. The surrounding saints now were clustered behind Mary and Baby Jesus, and ultimately at the center of the painting from kneeling Jesus was once again the center and focal point of this mural. But it required him to change his perspective. It required a paradigm shift.

That's just beautiful. I mean, the beautiful imagery of what he described is very key to our understanding of this passage of scripture. Let me pull up just a little bit and share some of that context with you. This is from Chapter 12 of Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul was writing Romans from Corinth. When we look at Corinthians: 1,2 in our New Testament as books, he's describing the arena of the church in Corinth at that time in the first century, is the context from which the author, Paul, is writing these words in Romans. So, what was going on in Corinth? The church was really embattled by a bunch of different voices that were trying to navigate the young Christians away from the true faith of the gospel, and it was clouding their perspective of who they were in Christ. Then they were also dealing with personality clashes and worship wars, things that happen in churches all over America and all over our globe today. And Paul, being amid all of that, trying to negotiate all those conflicts, speaks a word to the Roman Christians about don't be conformed, don't be assimilated to the things of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. I love the imagery of changing the perspective, changing your perspective from a kneeling point, a position of humility. And only from the position of humility do we begin to see the larger picture of what God is trying to accomplish in the world. Many of us have heard the words of Romans Chapter eight many times. Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. That's a hallmark of the book of Romans and a very passionate and powerful plea that Paul makes in his letter here. And then he segways from that incredible moment to talking about what Israel. Where is Israel in God's plan? So, Chapters 9-11, he deals with the concept of God's greater design - to reach the Gentiles, the non-Jews. What about the Jewish people? In Chapters 9-11, he says remember that God never goes back on his promises. God has something in mind. And then the climax of Chapter 11 is, I don't know what that plan is, Paul says, but thanks be to God that God knows what that plan is. Right after he says - Therefore, I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices wholly and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Then, he says, do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.

I don't know if you got this far in your study, Dominic, but why do you think Paul starts by suggesting that our minds need to be renewed? It is interesting because my gut reaction is emotion. So much of what we do and think and decide is driven by our emotion. And for me, my mind is playing catch up to kind of rein in the emotional response to the world around me. Anger, sadness, excitement. And sometimes you got to rein those things in. But I think so much of it has to do with verses that follow on tying the thread together that by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern. And then on into verse three; Instead think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one, there is this this cohesion, this synthesis of faith and rationality.

Beautiful. Yeah, that segway is important, especially when you look at these verses and you go further, as Dominic said, and into verse three and on. We hear Paul then say, if we start with our thoughts, and that is conformed to the image of Christ rather than the image of the world, then we begin to soberly evaluate ourselves. Don't look at your life in a way that is bigger or better than what it really is. And don't look at your life in a way that is less than what God created you to be. Be sober in your evaluation because by doing so, then you will get, not only a picture of what God is doing, but you will be able to develop a partnership with what God is doing. So much that's going on in our world today, Dominic, and you deal with young people a lot more than I do. Present company excluded. You deal with teenagers, young adults. And from that vantage point, they are nurtured in the environment of the culture that we now live in. What scares you about that culture and the influence that it potentially can have as it nurtures the young generations?

I think every generation, everyone here was the youth and young adults of their time. And at that time the adults in their environments were worried about how the world was influencing you. Every generation is concerned about the influences of the world. The problem is the world is constantly changing and developing; therefore, no two generations will ever be exactly alike. Nowadays we have an entire generation raised with technology. I remember being astounded when I was about 12 and my two-year-old brother got a VHS tape of Toy Story two for his birthday, and he took the tape, ran into the living room, plugged it in, pushed it into the VCR, turned everything on and hit play. And I remember thinking, oh, this is a problem. He's only two. And I was 12. My four-year-old can use a video game console controller to navigate on to a variety of different streaming services to select her favorite shows. She can also navigate my computer and my phone. And she's four. The amount of influence of the world is greater than ever before. Now, young people have access to the world, and the world has access to them. Not just an immediate circle of friends at school or church in your immediate environment. Now a young person, a teenager, can be in contact with people in other countries around the world, people with lots of different perspectives and lots of different motivations. That isn't necessarily a bad thing. But it is a sobering thing. We are constantly bombarded by advertising and that is shaping our perspective. We are constantly bombarded by news agencies whose primary focus is just to get you to watch their channel. We have more than ever before, and these young people are overwhelmed with information and many of them are shutting down. They don't know how to process it. And so, they filter all this information coming in through friends, primarily and family, to a certain extent, church, youth pastors, pastors. How do they react to these things that are bombarding us? But you know how a sponge can reach a point where it just can't take in any more water? These youth and young adults are taking in so much that they can't take in anymore. And if you just weigh up the amount of time they spend at church versus at school, by the time they get to church, there's almost no room for anything else to be absorbed. If I were to be a little fatalistic, I'd almost say, how can they not be conformed to this world?

So, the harsh reality is what Dominic is describing is a picture of our culture. How many of you here and online remember dial phones? How many of you remember having a landline phone? How many still have one? How many of you have a cell phone? This is now our new culture. We have the capacity to change, to shift, and what's missing in this overarching, overwhelming deluge of information and technology and data that's coming out from our culture and our world? What's missing in the emerging generations is the ability to not only process, but to apply value. So, we have instant access today, for as many relationships as we so choose. Social media, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, global connections at the drop of a hat. And yet what we don't have is a sense of personal intimacy and value for those relationships. So, the role of mentoring becomes even more important today. For those of us who are older or longer tenured to be able to speak into the lives of those who are going where we have been. And it can be a mutual thing, too, right?

I mean, young people know how to do this technology stuff better than we do. If you need help navigating on your new cell phone, ask a four-year-old.

But what I love with the perspective of having a mentor, particularly in this context, do not be conform to the world, but be transformed through the renewal of your mind. The technology we're bombarded with in the world isn't bad. Some of it is not good, but. A lot of it is just information. A lot of it is opinion. A lot of it is editorial. I don't want to leave you with the impression that all of this technology and all of this connectivity is somehow inherently wrong and harmful. It doesn't have to be. But what we need is that testing to discern. What is the will of God? What is good, acceptable, perfect? Having the ability, which is often these days, something that we gain from that mentor relationship is that ability to test and discern what is the will of God, what is good, what is acceptable, what is perfect. To me, this line here echoed Old Testament law - What is the will of God? What is acceptable to God? What is perfect? Those are good words but when you try and put them on yourself, that's overwhelming. I want to be acceptable. I have no hope of being perfect. And so, it's this impossible goal of the Old Testament of you must be perfect and you have to obey all of these rules and you have to do all of these things. And it feels like there's an echo of that but we're not being told necessarily to do them. We're being told that we can discern what those things are. We can set ourselves goals to work towards. And having that mentor help us say, all right, you're doing these five things. What if those five things are getting you to that goal? They might all be good things, but are they the right thing for the moment?

Beautiful. A little illustration of what Dominic just shared and what I shared a moment ago about us all being mentors for someone else. A mentor is a person who can coach us because they have been where we are going. You know, regardless of age. Last week you heard me share with you that that my mom has cancer, and she began her treatments this past week. So, for those of you who have faced into this, you know exactly what I'm about to describe. My mom was entering into the week with a lot of fear of the unknown. Chemo just has a reputation of evoking fear. So, we prayed a lot together and prayed for that peace that surpasses understanding. And mom is just incredible. She just walked into the cancer center determined, let's get this done with. She walked into the cancer center room where the chemo was offered, and there was a volunteer there who immediately came up, started introducing her to everybody in the room. At one point she sat her down in the chair where the chemo would take place, looked at her and she said, you know, I have been where you are. Eight years ago, I had cancer. And I know that this is scaring you. I know that chemotherapy and radiation can be frightful. But I want you to know two three things. #1 - You will emerge at the end of today feeling exactly like you did at this moment. #2 - You can get through this, because I did, and I had exactly what you had. #3 God's got you. This woman spoke into my mom's journey, from a place of having been where she is going. She was on the other side of it, and she looked at my mom and said, I do what I do today as a volunteer because God transformed my life with cancer. Never underestimate the power of your testimony, your story, your life experience. And just from that vantage point, you can mentor. You can give somebody else, regardless of their age, the gift of a word of encouragement and hope that they, whether they realize it or not, desperately need and want.

Dominic, what's the takeaway for you from this passage? As I read through this, what speaks to me is this is a challenge to pause, to take a moment and take stock. I need to take time to test the world around me. What am I doing with my time? What am I investing myself in? What are people asking of me? Many of these things may be good, but are they best in the moment? I have a variety of different responsibilities. Responsibilities, and all of them will draw on my time. But what is best, what is God's best? And taking a moment to not just dive into the first thing that's in front of me, but to prioritize. In doing so, I'm no longer under the control of the world around me. I am exerting a certain amount of control in my environment, not

control that I've got it all figured out. But taking the time to test it out, to think about it. I would offer that as a challenge this week. Morning is a great time to do it. Sit down with a cup of coffee, cup of tea, whatever you have at breakfast and look at your day. What do I need to do today? And just ask God to direct your thinking, to discern, test it out. Okay? Take time this week to think through what is asked of you and discern what is the will of God. What is good? What is acceptable? What is perfect?

Beautiful. And there we have it. Romans 12:2. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. So, allow the Holy Spirit to enter into our journey, to equip us with all of what we need. To honor you with our lives, and to give love and hope away, wherever we go. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.