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Part 4: "Thinkin' It Through"

NOTE: The following content is a raw transcript and has not been edited for grammar, punctuation, or word usage.

"What do you really want?" "What do you want?" "What do you want, really?" "What do you really, really want?" And we've said, throughout the series, that all of us, all of us, you could stand up right now and tell the story, all of us have gotten what we thought we wanted, and then in the end, it wasn't what we wanted.

All of us got who we thought we wanted and then realized that's not who we wanted. All of us, in our careers, academically, professionally, financially, relationally, and every 'ly' that part of our life, we have pursued things and gotten things that we thought we wanted, 'cause we went after it and we disciplined and we got it, and then it was disappointing, it wasn't what we really wanted, it was just what we wanted. And here's what we've said throughout the series, that what we naturally want, that what we naturally want is often in conflict with what we actually want. That what we naturally want, that what I want now, that what I want immediately, is often in conflict or conflicts with what I want ultimately. So to get what we really want, to get what we really want, and this is where we left last week, to get what we really want, we have to discover what we actually value.

Last week, I gave you an exercise and I told you about my experience going through the funeral exercise, and asking the question, "What would I want said about me at funeral?" Gotten great feedback. But the point is, to spend some time asking the deeper questions helps us move beyond naturally, to ultimately. And most people never stop to do this. And consequently, and this is the reason I've leaned into this, week after week after week, is because since most people don't do that, what happens is, you can leave a season of life and move into a new season of life, and lose the opportunity to get what you really want in life.

Now, let me just give you one example, and just pick on one group. All of you who are fathers, especially fathers with young kids, let me tell you something that you really want that you may not know you really want, and if you don't realize you really want this, you may miss the opportunity to have it. You really want the respect of your adult children. You really want, you will want to have the respect of your adult kids. They're 10, but when they're 20, you're gonna want them to respect you. You're gonna want your adult kids to want to be with you when they don't have to be with you. You are going to want the respect of your adult kids. You look at her, she's three or she's five, or she's nine, or he's eight, and you're thinking, "But one day, they're gonna be adults, let me just go ahead..." Dads, you just need to know. You are going to want the respect of your adult children and what you do now will determine whether or not you have that. Okay? Listen. No thing and no fling is worth losing the respect of your children.

And if you lose it over some thing or some fling, you may never, ever get it and you may never, ever get what you really want. And there are things you can do, dad, that set you up to never have the respect of your adult children. You'll have it if you think ultimately, you will lose it if you think naturally, and it's never been quite this quiet in the room. Anyway...

[laughter]

So, but that's a big deal, but just like you're all going, "Oh, my gosh," it's like you wanna get up now and go, "Honey, are you okay?" But that's the point, is we don't think in these terms because we think in terms of what's right in front of us, what's being advertised, what everybody else is driving, what they're doing, how they're spending their time, what they're doing on the weekends. But I'm just telling you, when you start thinking ultimately, when you start thinking big picture, when you start thinking beyond naturally, all of a sudden, the bigger issues and the bigger themes of life, you know what happens? They get front and center, because what happens is, as we've said throughout the series, is that, the things that we value most, they get shoved to the side. They're in the shadows, in the shadows, in the periphery of what we say we want is what we really want, what we ultimately value.

So I've said this, when we discover what we really value, we are less prone to settle for what we merely want and that's what I want for you and that's ultimately what you want for you. But when you discover, and only you can discover this, when you discover what you really value, you are gonna be less prone to settle for what you merely want. And then

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma

we ask this question, okay? "What does God really want?" You know what we want, we're learning what we really want, we know what we value, what do we really value, but what does God really want from our lives? And this is scary because we assume the rest of the question goes like this, "What does God really want from us?" But then we ask this question, we said, "What does a perfect parent want from their children?" And the answer is nothing.

Parents don't want things from their kids, parents want things for their kids. That when it comes to the father-child relationship, especially your relationship with your Father in heaven, God wants something for you, not from you. So, what does God want for you? The God who created you in his image, the God who loves you and revealed himself to you through Jesus, the God who we know from the gospel sent his son into this world to pay for your sins, the God who came as one of us, to stand with us, to show that he was for us. What does that God want for us? Is it something we should shy away from? Is it something we should run from? Is it something that should scare us away? So, last week we looked. We answered the question. What does God want for us? In other words, if you were to say, "God, I wanna become the kind of person you want me to be." What kind of person is that? We got a list, the Apostle Paul gave us a list. He said, "God wants for you peace and God wants for you self-control and God wants for you faithfulness and kindness and goodness and joy." So what you really want is what you were created for. And what you were created for, this is important, what you were created for is connected to who you were created by.

And so, this is when we discover that we are not as far off from what we want and what God wants as we think. But depending on how you grew up and depending on what kind of environment or maybe even in church environment that you grew up in, you grew up with a picture of God that made you think, "If I ever were to say yes to God, my life would be miserable." But it's because you, perhaps, have never discovered what we had learned from the New Testament, that God ultimately wants. And what you really want, not what you want, but what you really want and what God really wants for you, they may not be as far apart as you might have imagined. So don't be surprised if you come face to face with the will of your Heavenly Father, as you begin to ask, What is it that I really value? What is it that I really want?

Now, if you're not really a religious person and you don't connect with the Bible thing, you should take this seriously. This is as much for you as it is for anybody and let me explain why.

The kingdom of this world, and I'll explain what I mean by that in just a second, the kingdom of this world cannot give you, the kingdom of this world cannot provide for you what you really want. Now, when I say the kingdom of this world, I don't mean a bunch of old men in a dark room pushing buttons and pulling levers and controlling what happens in the world. I'm just talking about the world we live in, the culture we live in, the values that are pushed up to the surface in the world we live in. The kingdom of this world cannot give you what you really want. The kingdom of this world, our culture, is designed to distract you from what really matters, you know this, that the world you live in, the world that I live in, is designed not by somebody, it's just the nature of the world, it's designed to actually distract us from what really matters, which will rob you of what you really want. And here's why, because the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of this world that we live in is fueled by two things, upgrades and experiences. That's what we do. We upgrade things and we look for new experiences and more exciting experiences and more relational experiences.

And this whole of the kingdom of this world is fueled by upgrades and experiences, and that's okay, as long as you are not distracted from what really matters, from what you really value. As long as you don't allow it to distract you, there's nothing wrong with upgrades and there's nothing wrong with extraordinary experiences, but if that's the sum total of your life, you will never get what you really want. What you really want, you know this, it cannot be packaged, it can't be marketed, and it can't be sold. There's no app for that, there's no rap for that, and nobody claps for that. And here's what I mean by that, okay, it's simply this, look up here, it means that in the world that you live in, nobody's gonna help you with this.

There is no one at work, there is no one in the neighborhood probably, there are probably very few of your friends that when you get together, that you talk at this level. It's all about the distractions, it's all about the upgrades, it's all about the vacations, and the experiences, and who's there, and where are you gonna go, and all those wonderful things. And you could spend your whole life and miss out on what... Not just what God really wants for you, what you really want for you. Come on, when we went to school, school didn't help us with this. School got us educated, supposedly, school focused us on, what? Doing. What are you gonna do? What are you gonna do? What are you gonna be when you grow up? What are you gonna do? What are you gonna be when you grow up? School didn't help you become someone on

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma

the inside. School never helped you answer the question, what is it that you really want in life?

Work didn't help. Work focuses us on, what? Work focuses our attention on producing and providing. Producing and providing. We go to work to produce and to provide. Nobody at work, other than a few conversations here and there, nobody's gonna help you with this. So, that's why it's so important for you to spend some time discovering what is it that you really want, and then along the way, don't be surprised if you come face to face with the will of your Father in heaven. And maybe, for some of you, the God you have been running from since you were 16 or 17 or 18 or 21, isn't the God that exists at all. Maybe you'll discover and perhaps you'll discover there is a God who has invited you to call him "Heavenly Father" and he wants something for you, not from you.

Now, as we wrap up the discussion, I wanna go to a passage in the New Testament that is familiar, if you grew up in church, it won't be familiar, maybe, if you didn't. It's not one of the most famous ones. But in this passage of scripture, the Apostle Paul gives us a handle. He gives us a to-do. He gives us something that we can begin to embrace that's really, really practical as it relates to staying in the habit of asking the question, "What's most important and what's most valuable to me?"

Now, just a quick update, in case you didn't know, the Apostle Paul, of course, steps onto the pages of history not as a Christian, not as a Jesus follower, but as a Christian-hater. In the first century, he had so many Christians arrested, so many Christians stoned, so many Christians put to death, and then he became one. He became a Christian, and then he became the most ardent evangelist, the most energetic cheerleader for the church, and he went all around the Mediterranean realm creating all these churches, and he wrote letters and they make up over half of our New Testament. So, the Apostle Paul, one of the places that he did not go to plant a church was the city of Rome. And so, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome, he hadn't been there yet, and in the letter, he says, "Hey, I'd love to come someday, but I just haven't gotten around to it yet." But in this letter, that we call the Book of Rome and it's in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul explains a whole lot of things in terms of how God relates to human beings, and the point of Jesus, and all this cool theology, but maybe the most interesting thing is when he wrote it.

This letter was written around 57 AD. So Jesus died when... Was crucified around 30. So this is about 27 years after the resurrection, and here's something cool. 27 years after the resurrection, there were so many Christians, not in Palestine, not in the vicinity of Jerusalem. There were so many Christians in Rome, about 13 or 14 hundred miles away. Many months it took to get to Rome from that part of the world. There were so many Christians in Rome, it just says something about the authenticity of the claims of those first century Christians that Jesus rose from the dead. That the story of Jesus had spread that far, that quickly. So, Paul is writing to all these Christians living in Rome, during a time when Christianity was thriving and multiplying like crazy in Rome, really just a few years after the resurrection. So he writes this letter and we're gonna jump in the middle of the letter. In fact, we're gonna begin with this word, "Therefore," which means you've missed a lot. Okay? If you walk in and somebody says, "Therefore," it's like, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, catch me up. Everything you're about to say is based on what came before."

So this verse that I'm gonna read is in the middle of this letter, and everything that came before, the first eleven chapters, the apostle Paul has explained God's grace and God's mercy to humanity. And now he's about to say, "Since God is for you, since God sent his son to redeem you, since God has taken you out of Adam and placed you into Christ and he uses all this imagery, since you're alive from the dead," you know, he has all these stuff. He says, "Since all that is true," and then he gives these Roman Christians something very practical to do and something for you to do, something for me to do, is we ask the question, "How do we continue to discover what's most important? And how do we get to the place where what's most important is front and center and is no longer in the shadows and is no longer in the periphery of my life?"

Here's what he says, "Therefore, I urge you brothers and sisters," that is, I'm leaning in, I'm grabbing you by the collar and I'm saying, come on, come on, come on, come on, face to face and personal. I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy." In other words, "In light of God's mercy, I want you to do something. Because God is merciful, I want you to do something." Now, this is a show-stopper for some people, because depending on the kind of church you were raised in, if you grew up going to church as a child, perhaps you grew up in a church that said, "In view of hell, here's what you should do. In view of God's wrath, here's what you should do. In view of the fact that God is gonna get you if you don't, here's what you should do." But the Apostle Paul, who wrote half the New Testament said, "No. In view of

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma

God's mercy." In fact, earlier in the book, he says this, I love this phrase. He says, "His kindness," talking about God, "His kindness leads us to repentance," I love that, "His kindness".

His kindness and his great eventually just wears us down and wears us down and wears us down till we throw our hands up and say, "How could you love me that much in light of all I've done?" His kindness leads us to repentance. He is for us, he's for you. So, here's what he says, "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." Essentially, I want you... " And this is what they understood him to be saying, "I want you to die to you. I want you to die to your will." Now, the problem with that, as we all know, is that's like a blank check. That's like, "God, the answer is yes, and I don't even know what you're gonna ask me to do. And God, I will not... " And you just finish the sentence." And I promise I'll always... " And you just finish the sentence. Who's gonna do that? Who is gonna surrender their life to God without asking any questions? That's like there's just too much of a blank check. And Paul is so smart, he knew that we would object.

And so here's what he says. He says, "Actually, as irrational as that sounds, that's actually the most rational thing you could do." Here's how he says it, "This," putting yourself on the altar, basically surrendering yourself to the will of your Heavenly Father, "This is your true and proper worship." Now, the term true and proper are English words, come from one Greek word in the text, there's only one Greek word here, and it's the term 'logikos' where we get our word 'logic.' So, here's what Paul's saying. And this is a great interpretation of that term, but it's not an actual translation of the term. So, here's what he's saying, he's saying, "Surrendering yourself to God, climbing up on the altar, being a living sacrifice is actually the most logical thing you could do. In view of God's mercy, in view of all that God has done for you, the most rational thing you can do for a God who is for you is to be for that God. The most rational thing you can do, if God loves you, is to surrender to God." And the term worship, it can also mean the word service, and essentially this is the response he says is the most rational thing we can do.

In fact, if God loves you, if God loves you, surrendering isn't unreasonable, refusing to surrender is unreasonable. And then he says this, and he gets to the practical part, maybe this is the part you've heard before. He says, "In view of God's mercy, I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, present yourself to God as a living sacrifice and do not," now he gives us a do not, "And do not conform," or, "Do not conform any longer," or, "Do not be conformed," or, "Do not continue to be conformed," there are different translations, "And do not be conformed," or, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world." Now, this is very visual, because all of us have seen patterns, whether it's cooking, whether it's sewing, whether it's something that you press into a mould, we all know what a pattern is. And he says, "Look, you know," and he's talking to a first century audience, "You know," and he would say to us, "You know, that in the culture you live in, there are patterns, there are themes.

And Paul is saying, "Don't be pressed into the mould of the kingdom of this world." If we use our terminology, don't be distracted by upgrades and experiences. There is more to life, there is more to your life and God has a plan for you that is much, much bigger than that. Do not be conformed or pressed into the mould of this world or to this culture, but, and here's the contrast, be transformed, be transformed. And this Greek word, I'm gonna ask you a question, so get ready, okay, a little quiz. The Greek term translated, transformed is the term meta morpho, from which we get our word...

Metamorphosis.

Metamorphosis. So you know Greek. This is amazing, okay? Here's where we get our word metamorphosis. So here's what he's saying, this is powerful, he's saying, there is a process, and I don't want you to miss this, there is a process, and if you will engage in the process of being transformed, over time something is going to happen to you. Don't be conformed. Over time there has been a process that started in middle school, then high school, and then if you went to college, college and graduate school, over time you have been pressed into the mold of this culture that focuses you on what you want, not what you value. It focuses you on what you want now, not what you want ultimately. You've been pressed into this mold, I want you to be transformed. How are we transformed? He says, "I'm glad you asked." Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Now, this is the whole thing right here. The Apostle Paul is smart enough to know that we can't go out and just change our behavior. Nobody is that good. We've all tried that.

He says, "I don't want you to even focus on your behavior. I want you to focus on changing the way you think." And the way we say it around here, if you've been with us for very long, is this, when we see as God sees, that is when we begin

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma

to understand the world the way God understands the world, when we begin to see marriage the way that God sees marriage, when we begin to see money the way God sees money, when we see opportunity the way God sees opportunity, when we see families and our profession and our talents and our gifts and our time the way that God sees those things, we are more inclined to do what God wants us to do. That is when we see as God sees, when we renew our minds and we begin to see as God sees, we are more inclined to do as God says. This is one of the reasons church was so frustrating for so many of us, because perhaps you grew up in a church and they basically said, "Here's what you're supposed to do." And you said, "Why?" And they say, "Don't ask questions." The Apostle Paul says, "No. Ask questions," because as you understand why, you will be more inclined to do. That's why transformation begins with renewing the mind, not just changing the behavior. The way I say this is clunky, but it works, is this. New Testament imperatives, apart from New Testament thinking, results in short-term obedience and long-term frustration. New Testament imperatives, all the dos and don'ts in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul and what Jesus taught about, 'How to live our lives?' If you try to just do what the New Testament says to do without thinking and seeing the world as God sees it, the result is short-term obedience, right? Did you grow up going to church camp? Last night at camp you promised God everything, two weeks later, you didn't remember any of it. Why? Because you made a commitment, but you didn't change your thinking, short-term obedience and long-term frustration, and if I can just be real honest with some of you for a minute, this is the reason you dropped out of Christianity. This is the reason you dropped out of church. You were so frustrated, and you were frustrated with yourself. I have a really good friend and he said, "I would come to church, Andy," he said, "I would stand in the back and I would look at all these people coming in and I would say to myself, 'I'm just not this good. I'm just not that good. I'm just not this good. I'm not that good. I can't, I can't do what they do. I can't do Christianity. It's not that I don't necessarily believe, I just can't do it.' And why put myself in an environment where I'm just constantly frustrated, because I fail over and over and over and over." And the Apostle Paul is going, "Okay, wait. You're not transformed by the commitment of your will. You're transformed by the renewing of your mind."

You have to see the world differently. I'll give you an example. It's like refinishing furniture. You've ever refinished furniture? When you refinish furniture, what did you have to do? You had to sand off the old, put on the new, take off the old, put on the new. Take off the old, put on the new.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed, how? By taking off the old and putting on the new, taking off the old and putting on the new. And what is the old? What I naturally want. What is the new? What I ultimately want. What is the old? What I want now. What is the new? What do I want later? What is the old? What do I feel like I've gotta do? What do I feel I've got to have right now because everybody else? What is the new? The new is, God, what do you ultimately want for me? The old is things, the new is character. The old are things I can purchase and trade and upgrade and makes my experience richer, the new is what do I ultimately want? And the Apostle Paul says, "As you begin to renew your mind, as you begin to take off the old and replace it with the new, as you begin to extract some lies that you have believed your whole life about you, lies that you've believed about marriage, lies that you've believed about money, lies that you've believed about sex, lies that you've believed about friendship.

And you begin to renew your mind, as you begin to see as God sees, you'll be far more inclined to do as God says. But he's not done. He says, "And here's the result, here's the beauty, here's the payoff, here's the reason this process is worth engaging in, then, then, then as a result, after you engage in this process," and it takes some time to renew your mind, "Then, you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. So, he says this, "As you begin to renew your mind, as you begin to see the world as God sees it, as God created it. As you begin to see yourself, your kids, your marriage, your friends, as you begin to see as God sees, it'll be far easier for you to discern what God's will is." To which we are back to that whole thing of, "Yeah, but what is God's will? He says, "Just relax, I'll tell you. His good, his pleasing and his perfect will."

Good, it's good for you, it's ultimately what you want. It's pleasing, that means his satisfying, his acceptable, his fulfilling will for you. Perfect, a little Greek word, perfect means grown up, mature. And what does will mean? It means desire. That God has a desire for you, and you have the potential to discover what that desire is. And in the process, you discover, as we've said throughout this series, in the process you discover that, you know what? What I really want is not that far off from what God really wants for me. And we shouldn't be surprised by this. You know why? Because you were made in his image, you and your Heavenly Father have a lot more in common than you might think. But it's

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma

because we get distracted by natural that often times we miss the ultimate. Now, let me read the entire passage back to you real quick without a lot of comment here, we'll just put it all back together, okay? I've picked all the pieces apart.

So, here we go. Here's what he says, "Therefore, I urge you," beg you, "Brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy," not his wrath, not hell, in view of God's mercy, "To offer your bodies," climb up on that altar, "A living," not dead, "Sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." You're holy and pleasing to God. "This is your true and proper worship." This is the logical thing to do. This is the most rational thing to do in view of God's mercy, "And do not conform any longer," or, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed," how? "By the renewing of your mind." And as a result, "Then you will be able to test and approve," discern, figure out, examine carefully and come to the right conclusion, "What God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will." This is the process. This is the process that God will use to help reveal your short-term, shallow, kingdom of this world, thinking. This is how you discover what God values, and this is how you discover what is ultimately most valuable to you. This is how you discover what you were made for, what God wants for you. And perhaps, you'll discover it's what you really want.

So, last time I'm gonna ask, what do you want? What do you really want? What's most important? And my bet is, my bet is, it's more than upgrades and experiences. And if you fail to discover what you really value, you will never get what you ultimately, what you really want. But when you discover, when you discover what's most important, don't be surprised if you come face to face with your Heavenly Father, with the will of your Heavenly Father, his good, his pleasing, his fulfilling, his grown-up will for you. And that's how you get what you really want.

HowToGetWhatYouReallyWant-Pt4

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma