
Radical Transformation

Romans 12:1-2

Russ Kennedy

Introduction So what's up with this?

☒ By MIKE SCHNEIDER, Associated Press Writer ENTERPRISE, Fla. - The dishes, garbage and dirty laundry would pile up for days when Cat and Harlan Barnard's teenage children refused to do their chores. So the Barnards went on strike, moving out of their house and into a domed tent set up in their front driveway. The parents refuse to cook, clean or drive for their children — Benjamin, 17, and Kit, 12 — until they shape up.

"We've tried reverse psychology, upside down psychology, spiral psychology and nothing has motivated them for any length of time," said Cat Barnard, 45, as she sat in a lawn chair at an umbrella-covered table.

☒ The strike took Benjamin and Kit by surprise. They came home from school Monday to find their mother outside with handwritten signs that read "Parents on Strike" and "Seeking Cooperation and Respect!" Cat Barnard, a stay-at-home mom, and her 56-year-old husband, a government social services worker, decided their children needed to learn about empathy and responsibility.

The Barnards unsuccessfully tried smiley-face charts and withholding allowances to get their children to do chores. They even sought help from a psychologist. The tipping point may have been when Benjamin didn't offer to help his sweating, struggling mother work on the lawn Sunday, even though she should have been recovering from oral surgery.

While for many this story strikes us as odd or even funny, many parents resonate with the dilemma the Barnards found themselves in. They are the parents, yet oddly, they are the ones out on the street. Here is a home; here are some parents in real need of an extreme makeover.

On Thursday, January 6 at 9:00PM you can watch a popular show call Extreme Makeover. You can witness the all-new and exciting makeovers of Michael, a 38-year-old deputy sheriff from Huntington Beach, CA, and Tess, a 44-year-old human resources manager from Orlando, FL.

☒ Michael, a Los Angeles Police deputy sheriff and former U.S. national couples figure skater, has endured both physical and emotional pain as a result of his years of police work and pursuing his Olympic dreams. Michael was an alternate in the 1992 U.S. Olympic team and once ranked third in the nation, but his eleven years as a national figure skater took a major toll on his body. Nowadays he's skating solo and chasing criminals, which has resulted in numerous broken bones -- such as his nose, which has been fractured five times. His ex-fiancée recently broke off their engagement just days before their wedding, leaving Mi-

chael heartbroken. While doing time at the makeover mansion, his ex-fiancée surprises him with a phone call and delivers some stunning news. Michael turns to the Extreme Team to give him the chance to mend his broken down body and spirit and to score a perfect 10 once again.

Michael's procedures include a nose job, lower eyelid lift, chin implant, ears pinned back, liposuction of the abdomen, love handles and chin, removal of skin cancer, tattoo removal, Botox on forehead and frown lines, LASIK eye surgery, 1 extraction, 10 upper and 4 lower da Vinci porcelain veneers, and Zoom whitening. 

And, further, Michael Thurmond has an Extreme Team Exercise Tip for You: When you are working on reshaping a body part (rear end, legs, tummy) visualize how you want them to look. Believe it or not, your mind has a powerful effect on your body!

Well, if only we could go on a reality TV show and drag our kids with us and come out with an extreme makeover. If only visualizing the way we want to be as parents or our kids to turn out as would make it happen.

But, you know, many, many families are in need of an extreme makeover, a radical transformation. So we set aside each January for our Family Enrichment Conference. During the morning and evening services we address the challenges and changes facing our families.

Our Difficult Challenges

Any way you look at it, parents today face many difficult challenges.

Our Present Situation

In many ways, our present situation is different from earlier generations. At the heart of what makes it different is the technology we are surrounded with. That technology challenges us as parents in several ways.

It brings more rapid change and the sense of dislocation and unease that comes with it. Fashions and fads change faster than we can possibly keep up with. Last week's greatest hit or most watched movie or video are simply melting away on the video rental shelf. Yesterday's sci-fi is today's remote control or PDA. We are watching our world and our sons and daughters change at a frightening rate.

It makes the influence of others more accessible and more attractive than ever before. Media in all its forms is having a powerful affect on you as parents and particularly on your sons and daughters. I want you to hear me (and all the other speakers as well). If you attempt to isolate your children from those influences, you are failing to equip them to deal with all the forms of media when they are out on their own. And make no mistake parents; a great deal of what you think about parenting is powerfully and persuasively presented to you through everyone from Dr. Phil to Dr. Dobson.

It presents temptations and vicarious experiences of sin to your sons and daughters in ways and at times most parents have difficulty wrestling with.

It has accelerated the casting off restraints and in your face expressions of folly. What we are seeing is that younger and younger children are sinning in ways that most of us would have not even known existed, much less how to do at that age. From my first administrative teaching job in a school to the last one spanning 16 years, I saw elementary kids beginning to act in ways that we would have associated with junior high kids. I saw high school age kids who were almost hardened criminals as sophomores and juniors.

In many ways, our present situation is like those of our parents and their parents before them all the way back to Adam and Eve.

We are faced with our own love for ease, comfort and peace at any price. We simply don't want to be bothered by the background din of our children's troubles. Many parents begin with wanting children, have them and treat them as prized possessions. Then grow to feel like they are aliens from another planet.

We are sometimes child-centered parents. The world of your lives is in orbit around your children. All that matters is their happiness, well-being and contentment. Their urges and wants become your leashes. Their complaints or criticisms can ruin your days. They manipulate and manage you to get what they want. And perversely, you prize this and promote this as good parenting.

We are faced with the stark reality of sin. We do things that are wrong. Our children express attitudes and actions that are simply wrong. Adam and Eve woke up one morning to face the horror of a son who had murdered his brother. And on and on it goes. We may not have that. But we can face rebellion, fornication, drunkenness, drug addiction, laziness, folly, irresponsibility – and we are just looking in the mirror.

Some Prevalent Symptoms

So, many of you are thinking to yourself, “This does not describe me or my family at all. After all, my kids are in Christian School or are being home schooled. I have read everything I can get my hands on about parenting. I'm OK.” Well, I hope so. But let me see if I can ask some questions that point to symptoms of parenting troubles.

Do you regularly feel angry or frustrated with your son or daughter? Notice I said, *regularly*. Is there a habitual or thematic anger in your relationship with your sons or daughters?

Do you ever find yourself yelling at or with your son or daughter? Maybe it isn't the volume but the tone? The edgy sarcasm passed off as witty comments. Or do you find yourself simply avoiding them? You see what they are doing and wearing or listening to or engaged in or watching and you simply turn away?

Do you ever hear yourself saying, “You make me feel sad when you...”? Or the classic, “When I was growing up we would never have...”? Or maybe as a Christian, “I did everything I was supposed to and look how you...”

Does this ever happen in your home? You walk into your teenager's room and the pause button is quickly hit or the screen is blanked? Something is put away or slipped into a pocket?

The Prescribed Solutions

We certainly have no shortage of prescribed solutions. There is a massive industry in parent advice, both Christian and non-Christian. I have made a point in preparation for this series, to peruse many of the most popular web sites aimed at helping parents. Here is what I find.

There is little moral basis for the parenting guidelines or advice. The startling thing in even a lot of religious, and dare I say, even Christian parenting books, is the use of the Bible without the authority of the Bible. In other words, the Bible is not approached as having an authoritative, much less sufficient, final word on parenting.

Most of deeply insightful advice used to be the passed-on common sense of prior generations. I don't care where you look, the whole self-help industry in both the secular and religious worlds are simply various forms of advice, some of it common sense, some of it silly and some of it foolish and destructive.

Parenting is mostly about what my children become. It is entirely pragmatic. My job as a parent is to produce a certain kind of child. What that product is supposed to be will be defined by my philosophy of life, my religion. At the end of the day, it will be shaped by my own heart trusts and treasures.

Parenting is mostly about technique. It is mostly about the how-to of what I do as a parent. My own observation is that much of it are techniques to overcome our own character failures that are being transmitted to and mimicked by our children.

Parenting advice is dominated by the psychologies of the day. The more I read in all areas, the more I am struck by the fact, and I mean fact, that the psychologies are presenting alternative spiritualities. They tell parents what their children ought to be like, what they ought to prize and aim for, and the techniques to achieve those aims.

I can go on and on. We need an authoritative, sufficient Word on parenting from the Designer of families whose commands and counsel make up wisdom. Then we need to take the precepts and principles from God's Word, marry them to our present life situations and develop practical steps of action for parenting that pleases God.

But that is not where we start. If we do what I am talking about above, we may merely become moralists, behaviorists or even worse, Pharisees. In other words, extreme parent transformation does not begin with external, measurable, behaviors. It must begin in the heart. Radical transformation is not an extreme makeover. It is deep and difficult and decisive heart change.

Our Biblical Direction

Now we need to turn to the Bible for direction and answers. If we are going to be transformed as parents, Romans 12:1-2 starts and shapes us in our pursuit. If you are going to make progress along the way, then you must understand two essential truths.

Just as we you must not go around Romans 12:1-2 to get to the rest of the book, you must not go around it to try to be different as a parent (or in any other realm of life). Further, we must not sever Romans 12:1-1 from Romans 1-11. So there is a danger in picking up these two verses by themselves. The danger is that we will try to be changed in our parenting without the gospel.

Romans 1-11 are about the gospel, about the good news of the redeeming work of God in Christ. The good news first tells us about our sin, where it comes from and how it spirals downward. It warns us of its consequences in depravity, despair and death. It shows us the awfulness of our sin. Then the gospel gives us the good news that Christ delivers us from our sinful condition and our sinful practice. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we have been set free from sin so that we are no longer its subjects, under its dominion, rule or power. The gospel also tells us the good news that God planned our salvation in such a way that all His people would actually possess what was promised and possible. Finally, the gospel also tells us the good news that this wonderful salvation brings us into an unbreakable and inseparable relationship with God.

Now, if this is what the gospel, the good news tells us, then how are we going to live it out in the day-to-day mess? How do we move from an explanation of the gospel to application of the gospel? Well, we do it through two radical steps that put us on the path of pleasing God.

A Sacrificial Presentation of our Bodies (v.1)

Paul couches this in terms of an appeal or an exhortation. What he calls for should weigh heavy on us because where he grounds it. Because of or through God's multiplied mercies to us, we ought to respond by presenting our bodies to God. This is a decisive act – there is an initial dedication at our salvation that is constantly renewed in holy and God-pleasing sacrifices day by day. Having presented yourself to God, be standing before God as a living sacrifice.

That we are to present ourselves, our bodies as living sacrifices gathers up the Old Testament story of Isaac and the death and resurrection of Jesus as its root themes. At the end of the day, what is being called for here is for us to be willing to live as a sacrifice – to die to our own agenda and live to serve God and His kingdom. Further, this living sacrifice is to be holy and acceptable to God – it is to meet His standards and requirements.

This is so very important. God defines parenting radically different from the way the world does. Parenting in the Bible is not about what is produced, but in faithfulness to what God requires. Doing all that God requires guarantees you nothing except that you have pleased God. But failure to please God in our own character and conduct as parents then contributes to, but does not cause, the sinfulness of our children. In order to keep on pleasing God even when it doesn't seem to be

working requires a decisive commitment of ourselves to God. It will be hard. It will mean sacrifice, not in the common way we think of it, but in ways that God will use to expose our own heart. In other words, you must present yourself to God as a living sacrifice so that you will be holy and pleasing to God in your parenting.

We are to do this because this is how true rational or spiritual worship and service of God is defined. Worship is not just a Sunday event; it is the moment by moment stream of believing God in an obeying way – living obediently by grace.

A Transforming Renewal of our Minds (v.2)

Understand this: the gospel comes to us as an agent of change. It requires that we turn from self to our Savior, from worshipping and serving and being mastered by our idols to worshipping, serving and being mastered by God. The gospel is about how Christ through His death, resurrection and Spirit changes us from self-absorbed sinners to God-besotted saints, that is, how the gospel conforms us to Christ. So there must be an obedience of faith in the gospel that is grounded in a commitment to change.

While it is easy to treat verses 1 and 2 as though they are parallel, verse 2 serves to expand on the “holy and acceptable to God” qualification of the living sacrifice. The body is presented worthily to God because the inward man has been radically transformed by a renewed mind and an exercised discernment. So, we do not have step 1 and step 2. We have the whole (v.1) of which (v.2) is the core.

Now let us look at this a bit more closely.

The imperative here is *A SINGLE COMMAND* stated through two words: not conformed but transformed. We are not to be shaped by the world’s mold – its vision or values. This means that we must not conform to the idols of our own past – the world of our flesh and pre-salvation life. We must be undergoing a radical *metamorphosis* – a radical change into what God has designed and destined us for in Christ. There is a pattern of this age that seeks to master us and shape us. And there is the pattern of Christ whom we serve and by whom we are shaped.

This radical transformation is first, *AN INWARD ONE*. It has to do with rebuilding and renewing our minds. Paul elsewhere talks of bringing every thought captive to obedience of Christ. This inward mind renewal has two major aspects:

- The replacement of error with truth – the identifying of where we believe lies, myths and philosophies and replacing them with truth, doctrine and a Person, the Lord Jesus. This is our formal, “I believe in an obeying way” life statements. This is where we tend to be poured into the world’s mold, where our thinking about parenting is mostly shaped by what the world says and what it values and treasures.
- The renewal of our inner conversations – our “self-talk”. There is a constant inner stream of words by which we anticipate, experience and interpret life. This self-talk is either pleasing or displeasing to God – self-oriented or God-others oriented. It includes fantasies, inner debate, moral weighing, warnings from conscience. It is often unobserved and rarely

closely analyzed. It is how what we believe informs our wills and shapes affections. It interacts with our wants and desires, either reinforcing them or reacting against them.

What is being called for here is a radical change in our thinking – its content and stream that leads to a radical change in our behavior.

The renewal of mind that transforms us both *VIEW*s and also *VALUE*s God's will. It *discerns* God's will and *delights* in God's will and *does* God's will. We are not here talking about subjective leading in decision-making. We are talking about wisdom – knowing God's Word, bringing to bear on our situation to illuminate it, interpret it and indicate the path of righteousness in it.

Now it is imperative for me to say this: you must not only view, discern or know what God's will is, you must also value, delight or want God's will. Many, many people clearly know what God's Word says about life situations, but do not want or prize God's will. Remember, our choices and emotions flow out of what we think and what we want. So to *discern* God's will means that we *delight* in God's will as good, acceptable and perfect.

Conclusion Does this surprise you? It shouldn't. Permanent, radical transformation in your parenting can only happen along the trajectory of Biblical truth.

You do what you do and feel the way you do, you behave and experience emotions, because of what is going on in your inner man, your heart. Your heart, according to the Bible, is the center of your beliefs and your wants. What you actually believe drives your wants. The two of these are the source of your choices and your emotions.

Trying to change your emotions or your actions directly may bring short term relief, but will not produce lasting change. Real lasting change will come as you repent at the heart level. Real lasting transformation comes when your thoughts and wants are changed.

God's Word defines beliefs, wants, choices and emotions that are pleasing to God. In other words, Biblical parenting will involve both the inner and outer person. Idolatrous wants must be repented of as well as the angry words those wants produce must be changed into gracious, edifying words.

So let me challenge you to change – to seeking out what God says and bowing to Him and His Word. Keep on presenting yourself to God to a dying kind of life. Don't let the world pour you into its mold. Examine everything you believe and want, poised to change them. Heed carefully the commands and counsel of God's Word. Join us each Sunday evening as we work out practical wisdom under God's Word for God pleasing parenting.

