We only get one life to live. D. H. Lawrence said, “If only one could have two lives. The first one in which to make one’s mistakes . . . and the second in which to profit by them.” But, there is no dress rehearsal for life. You go on stage immediately.

We have all made mistakes. But, how can we make the most of the rest of our lives? Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2. [Read]

**What should we do to make the most of the rest of our lives?**

- **First, Break from the mold.**

Paul wrote: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” In other words, we are called to be different than the world around us. J.B. Phillips translates this verse as “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.” This is very hard. There is a lot of pressure to conform. It is hard to be different.

Here is an actual question from a final exam for a police academy:

You are on patrol [in the outer part of the city] when an explosion occurs in a gas main in a nearby street. On investigation you find that a large hole has been blown in [the sidewalk] and there is an overturned van lying nearby. Inside the van there is a strong smell of alcohol. Both occupants—a man and a woman—are injured. You recognize the woman as the wife of your [police sergeant], who is presently out [of the country]. A passing motorist stops to offer you assistance and you realize that he is a man who is wanted for armed robbery. Suddenly a man runs out of a nearby house, shouting that his wife is expecting a baby and that the shock of the explosion has made the birth imminent. Another man is crying for help, having been blown into an adjacent canal by the explosion, and he cannot swim.

The police officer thought for a moment, picked up his pen, and wrote: “I would take off my uniform and mingle with the crowd.”

It is very tempting just to mingle with the crowd. As Christians, it is tempting to take off our sort of Christian uniform and just mingle with the crowd. But, we are called to remain distinctive, to retain our Christian identity, wherever we are and whatever the circumstances.
There are two types of Christians: those who are chrysalis and those who are chameleons. We are called to be a chrysalis rather than a chameleon. A chrysalis becomes a butterfly. A chameleon just blends in with surroundings changing color. It matches its color to the color of the background. Similarly, chameleon Christians match their lifestyles to whomever they are around. If they are around Christians, then they act like a Christian. If they are around non-Christians, they change themselves to fit into the environment. A legend has it that an experiment was carried out on a chameleon. It was put on a plaid background with multiple colors. It could not take the tension and it exploded. So, it is difficult to be one thing at one place and another thing at another place.

We are not called to fit in. We are called to be different. Being different doesn’t mean being weird. You don’t have to dress weird or talk in some weird religious language. We can be normal. In fact, the more like Jesus we become, the more normal we become—in the sense that we are more fully human. Somebody asked Hans Kung, a theologian, why he was a Christian. He said: “in order to be fully human.” Everything else is a distortion.

But, it takes courage to be a Christian. I heard about an experiment on teenagers regarding the effect of peer pressure. What they did was to invite ten teenagers into a room and they were under the impression that their eye sight was being tested. But in fact, they were studying the effects of peer pressure. They were shown three lines and asked which line was the shortest. Nine of the ten teenagers were told to say that the second shortest line was the shortest line. They wanted to see how the tenth teenager would respond. They were told to raise their hands when they saw the shortest line. They found that more than 75% of the teenagers agreed with the other nine. They knew that it was wrong, yet they went with everyone else. They did not have the courage to say that the group was wrong. G.K. Chesterson said this: “right is right even if nobody does it and wrong is wrong even if everybody is wrong about it.” So, we are called to be different.

Let me give three example of areas in which we are called to be different.
**First of all, it is the area of backbiting.** It is so easy to talk negatively about people behind people’s back. But we are called to be different. We are called to be uplifting and loving. I think we can always find something nice to say about other people. Be intentional. “I’ve heard that he is very nice to his dog.”

**Also, the area of grumbling and complaining.** There is always something we can grumble about in life. But we are called to be different. We are reminded to have an attitude of joy and thanksgiving.

**Also, the area of sexual morality.** It means that we are not going to conform any longer to the sexual standard of the world. You know, sex is God’s invention. He is not looking down from heaven in astonishment and saying: goodness gracious! What will they think of next? He designed it. He invented it. C.S. Lewis put it like this: “pleasure is God’s idea, not the devil’s.” The Bible affirms our sexuality. God made us sexual beings and designed our sexual organs for enjoyment. The Bible celebrates sexual intimacy. There is a whole book in the Bible about it—Song of Solomon.

The inventor of sex also tells us how to enjoy it to its maximum potential. The biblical context of sexual intercourse is a lifelong commitment in marriage between one woman and one man. Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 affirming it. It says: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” Marriage is a public act of leaving parents and making a lifelong commitment to your spouse. It involves being united with your partner. The Hebrew word means literally “glued together”—not just physically and biologically, but emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, socially, and every way. This is the Christian context of “one flesh.” The biblical doctrine of marriage is the most exciting, thrilling, and positive view of marriage that exists. It shows us God’s perfect plan for us.

Why is sex outside of marriage wrong? “We are not hurting anyone...” The Bible, however, says there is a danger of going outside of the boundaries. You are hurting someone. Every act of sexual intercourse effects a “one flesh” union. When this union is broken, people get hurt. If you glue two pieces of cardboard together and then rip them apart, you hear the sound of ripping and bits of each side of the cardboard ends up on the other. Similarly, becoming one flesh and breaking apart leaves scars. We
leave broken bits of ourselves in the broken relationship. We see this happening all around us when God’s standard is ignored.

There are broken marriages, broken hearts, hurt children, sexual disease, and messed up lives. On the other hand, when God’s standards are upheld, we see blessings that God bestows on marriage and sex. Why tarnish something so beautiful for short term pleasure? I’ve never met anyone who told me, “I so regretted waiting for marriage.” I’ve met many people who said the opposite.

The good news is that it is not too late. God’s love through what Jesus has done on the cross brings forgiveness, healing and restoration.

So, what Paul is saying is, “let’s not let the world squeeze us into its mold. Instead, let’s make an impact on the world. Let’s be the salt and light of the world and show the world something much better.”

So, this is the first thing: break with the past mold.

Second thing we should do to make the most of the rest of our lives is to make a new start.

Paul says in Romans 12:2: “be transformed.” J.B. Phillips translates this as “let God transform you by a complete change.” Some of us say, uuuul—complete change? What’s that meant? I like my life as it is. It is not so bad. Even if the new life appears attractive, there is still a feeling that at least I know what I am used to. It is like a caterpillar turning into a beautiful butterfly. There is still a fear of change.

There were two caterpillars sitting on a leaf and having a conversation. They saw a beautiful butterfly flying by. One caterpillar said to the other: “You ain’t never going to see me going up that high. That’s the fear of leaving behind what we know.

God does not ask us to leave behind anything that is good. He asks us to get rid of garbage. Until we get rid of the garbage, we can’t enjoy the good things he has ready for us. This is a true story. There was a woman who was homeless. She put all her stuff into a shopping cart in masses of plastic bags. She panhandled all day long and cursed those who did not give. At her funeral, there were actually a lot of well dressed people who were there. This woman actually had inherited millions of dollars. She actually had a large house and many valuable paintings. But, she chose to live on the streets with her
plastic bags and shopping cart full of trash. She could not bring herself to leave her lifestyle, and she never enjoyed her inheritance.

The sad thing is that there are many people around now who will not leave their lifestyle to enjoy something far better—the treasures of our inheritance. What we have inherited is far better than anything we might be holding on to.

**Paul shows us a glimpse of what these treasures to be enjoyed are.**

Let’s read verses 9ff. [Read 9-21]

**First, it is sincere love.** The Greek word for sincere is *anahipocritos*—which literally means without hypocrisy. Hypocrites were Greek actors. They were play acting. They wore masks. Many of us are not sure about whether other people will accept us for the way we really are. So, we put on masks. Two people meet and they both have masks and there is no real authentic relationship. Paul, here, tells us to drop the mask. It means to take the risk and revealing ourselves to each other. When we know that God loves us as we are, we are free to take off our masks. This means that the treasures of our inheritance include a new level and depth of relationships.

**The second treasure is an enthusiasm for the Lord.** It says in verse 11: never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. There is excitement, zeal, and fervor in our lives as we serve the Lord. The opposite of enthusiasm is cynicism.

Some of you have had a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit today. That’s great, but what matters is what happens in the long term. You may wake up Sunday or Monday and think that nothing happened. You will experience spiritual warfare, which will be the topic tomorrow—Sunday.

A couple that I know had absolutely the worst wedding disaster I have ever seen. The photographer did not show up. They waited and waited but he did not show up. They decided to start any way. In the middle of the service, he showed up and I saw him rushing up to the front and start to take pictures in a very disruptive way. Then after the wedding, he stopped all the people from leaving and asked them to stay and asked the bride to do the entrance again. It was disaterous! This was just the first of the disasters
of that wedding. Then, I heard that they had a lot of disaster happen at their honeymoon. This was about 12 years ago. However, if you talk to them now, they are very happily married. If you have a great initial experience as a Christian, that is great. But, what is the most important is the long term. So, even if you did not have a good experience, that is okay. What matters is the long term.

**Next, there are treasures of harmonious relationships.** Look at the passage from verse 13-21. You find words and phrases like share, hospitality, blessing those who curse, rejoicing with those who rejoice, mourning with those who mourn, living in harmony, not being proud and associating with people of low position, not being conceited, overcoming evil with good. This is a glorious picture of the Christian family that God calls us into. It is full of love, joy, patience, faithfulness, generosity, hospitality, blessing, rejoicing, harmony, humility and peace; where good is not overcome by evil, but evil is overcome by good. These are some of the treasures in store when we leave behind the garbage.

**So, how do we do this? How do we leave the past behind and make a new start to these wonderful treasures?**

Let’s read Romans 12:1: Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. This is an act of the will. **God wants us to offer all of ourselves and everything about our lives.**

**First, that includes our time.** We offer time, our most valuable possession. We need to give him all of our time. This does not mean we have to spend all of our time doing Bible study and praying. It means that we change our priorities to the priorities of God. When we become a Christian, one of the things that happens to us is that people become more important than possessions.

It is easy to get our priorities wrong. There was an actual advertisement that appeared in the newspaper: “Farmer seeks lady with tractor with view to companionship and possible marriage. Please send picture . . . of tractor.” He had his priorities wrong.
Our priorities must be our relationships, and our number one relationship is our relationship with God. We need to set aside time to be alone with God. We need to spend some time with other Christians worshipping God on Sundays. We need to meet with other Christians in a smaller group to encourage each other during the week like in a Home Fellowship Groups. For the next few weeks, I hope Tuesday night meetings would be important to you.

**Second, our ambitions.** Should we have ambitions? Yes! In fact, Jesus commands us to be ambitious. He said: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and its Righteousness and all these things will be added on to you.” There is a dramatic difference between our primary ambition and our secondary ambitions. It is really pathetic when our ambition is all about ourselves—so selfish. It is really sad and pathetic when the only ambition one has is to be wealthy, to have more and more money. When they get ten million dollars, they are not satisfied because they want eleven million dollars. They want more and more and more and more. What is the point? What happens when you die? What are you going to say to God if he asks you what you did with your life?

“I made masses and masses of money.”
That’s great. How much money did you make?
I made one hundred million dollars.
Wow, we never had that much money here before. Now, we have enough for all of us to play Monopoly.

Also, it is pathetic to have an ambition to be the chairman of the multi-national corporations, or a basketball superstar, a famous actress, or the president. Now, don’t get me wrong; these are great secondary ambitions. You may want to be these things to make an impact for God, to bring God’s influence to these sectors and people. But, if these are your primary and sole ambitions, it is pathetic. It is. So many people give their whole life to them. We need to offer our ambition to the Lord. Pray: “Lord, I offer over my ambitions to you.”
The third thing we need to offer when we offer our bodies is our possessions.
The Bible does not ban private property or making money or saving or even enjoying the
good things of life. What is forbidden is a selfish accumulation for ourselves, an
unhealthy obsession with material things, and putting our trust in them. Why? Because
they lead us to perpetual insecurity and lead us away from God. What is the solution?
How do we break the grip of materialism in our lives? Generous giving is the only way
to break the hold of materialism.

Next we need to offer our ears. What we listen to. We need to turn away from
gossips and other negative things that bring us and others down. Instead, we need to turn
ourselves to hear what God may be saying to us, through the Bible, prayer, books and
whatever.

We offer our eyes—what we see. Do we see people with jealousy or lust? Or do we see people through the eyes of God. How would God see this person?

We also offer our tongues. Apostle James tells us that the tongue is a powerful instrument. We can use our tongue to destroy, curse, gossip, or to draw attention to ourselves. Or we can use them to worship God and encourage others.

We also offer him our hands. We offer them in works of service to others.

We also offer God our sexuality. We decide to use our sexuality not for self-

gratification but to reserve it for the good and pleasure of our spouse, future or now.

We can’t pick and choose. Paul says to offer our entire bodies.
The paradox of Christian life is that as we give God our bodies, we find our freedom. Living for ourselves is slavery; Saint Augustine said: “His service is perfect freedom.”

So, Paul does not just call us to present our bodies to God; but he says a little more. He says to present our bodies to God as living sacrifices. Yes, doing all of these things—presenting every part of our being involves a lot of sacrifices. William Barclay, a great biblical scholar said this: “Jesus came not to make life easy but to make men great.” We have to be prepared to go God’s way and not ours. We have to be willing to give up things we know are wrong. If we need to, we need to make
restitutions. Make things right. We have be willing to fly the Christian flag and stand ground even if people are hostile towards the faith.

In many parts of the world, Christians are persecuted and even tortured. In fact, they say the Twentieth Century is the most persecuted Century since the beginning of the Church. But, we live in relative freedom in this society. The criticism and hardship we face as Christians is not even worth mentioning compared to the persecution for Christians around the world.

Nonetheless, our faith may involve making sacrifices. We have to be realistic. Some of your family members may not be very happy about your faith. Some of your friends may laugh at your faith. Some of you may have to think seriously about how you are going to make things right. For example, I heard of a couple who had to sell their house after they became a Christian because they had not paid taxes for a long time and they had to make things right. For some of you, taking this seriously may mean making a decision about a relationship. Maybe it is a decision to stop sleeping together. Some of you have to struggle with these issues. Being a fully devoted follower of God requires honest introspection and decisions regarding various areas of your life. There is a cost involved. It is a sacrifice.

So, why should we do it? Why should we submit our bodies as living sacrifices?

Let’s look at Romans 2:2b: “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” So, the first reason is because God loves us and wants the very best for us. He wants us to submit our bodies to him so that “we can approve what God’s will is.”

The devil always gives us a false view of God. One of the names of devil is Satan—which means in Hebrew a slanderer. He slanders God, telling people that God is going to be a fun spoiler and that God wants to ruin our lives.

We often are deceived into believing these lies. We are worried that if we trust God with our lives, he is going to take away all of the enjoyments in life. If Bennett came to me on a Saturday and said, “Daddy, I want to spend the whole day with you today doing whatever you want. I want to give my whole day to you.” I am not going to
have a diabolical laugh and say, “Right, that is what I have been waiting for.” And lock him in the closet.

If I am not like this, it is crazy to think that God would treat us worse than I would treat Bennett. God loves us a million times more than I love Bennett. And He wants the best for our lives. **The passage says His will for us is good. He wants the very best.**

**Then the passage says His will for us is pleasing. It will please him and it will please us in the long run.**

**Then the passage says His will for us is perfect.** We will not be able to make it any better. But so many of us think we know better than God. Whether we admit it or not, we think: “I can do a little better than God. God is a bit out of touch. He has not caught up with the modern world and the things that we enjoy. I think I will run my own life and keep God out of it.” But, we will never do better than God’s perfect will, and when we try, we often make a big mess of our lives.

Many of us have this exact attitude. The good news is that God gives us a second chance. If we trust God with our lives, God will show us what His will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

**The second reason why we should do it is to respond to what God has done for us.**

Let’s look at Romans 12:1 again. This whole section starts with the word, “therefore.” What therefore? Paul has been talking about what Jesus has done on the cross and how we have been liberated from the bondage of sin. Then, he says—therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy. So, why should we do it? Because of God’s mercy for us. Because of what he has done for us. We do it as a response to His love. Our Christian life is a response to the love of God. It is not about do’s and don’t’s. It is about having a relationship and responding to the love of God. C.T. Studd, a professional athlete who gave up money and comfort and became a missionary to Inland China said: “If Jesus Christ be God, and he died for me, nothing is too hard for me to do for him.”
Our motivation for our Christian life is our love for God in response to the love of the Father. What an awesome thing it is to walk in a relationship with God, to be loved by Him, and to serve him, all our lives. It is the best, most rewarding, fulfilling, meaning, satisfying way to live.

May we pray.
Read Romans 12:1-2.
Resolve to turn away from everything you know is wrong.
Thank you.
I give you my body as living sacrifice.