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Title: "But God..."

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Have you seen the TV series "Flip That House?" Each episode tells the story of a person or group of people who buy a beat up, run down house at a bargain price, sink a lot of sweat, hard work and money into it in a relatively short period of time, and then turn around and sell it, hopefully for a nice profit.

Watching the show, I've learned a few things about flipping a house. Even more than that, I had a pipe burst at my house back in February. It is much more impactful when you learn it personally. Some of the things I watched others deal with, I have had to deal with. "Flippers" can look at a beat up, trash-infested dump and envision a bright, beautiful future for it. "Flipping" always seems to include frustrating surprises, and problems you never expected to discover. "Flipping" always seem to take longer and cost more than expected. (I've found that to be quite true.) "Flipping" can test the strength and resilience of any friendship or marriage. "Flipping" or house repairs appear to be much more fun to watch on TV than to do in real life! (That's REALLY true!) Perhaps there's one or more here today who have had experience in flipping a house, and I suppose a few more have asked themselves the question, "I wonder if I could flip a house?"

Have you ever felt like you wanted to flip your life? The apostle Paul had his life flipped unexpectedly one day while walking down a road. He was NEVER the same, and in his letter to his friends in the city of Ephesus he looks back on days past and writes about how God flipped their lives. I'd like for us to consider 5 questions today as we think about these words written by Paul.

- 1. Question #1: Does my life really need to be flipped?** It's tempting (and common) for a person to look at his or her life and quickly conclude, "My life doesn't need to be flipped...it just needs a fresh coat of paint!" Don't be so sure about that! Veterans of "flipping" houses know that a first glance at a house can be dangerously misleading. On the surface it appears that some new appliances, updated carpet and fresh paint is all that is needed. However, veterans know that the structural integrity of the house needs to be inspected. Is the electrical system in good shape? How's the plumbing? Is there any termite damage? Any mold issues? People at first glance can be pretty impressive as well. John Ortberg said it in an interesting fashion in his book entitled, "Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them." We all have our "stuff," and our sin has made an attack upon the structural integrity of our lives. One writer comments on the progressive nature of sin's attack upon our soul. He writes that: **A. First, sin kills INNOCENCE.** Every parent will inevitably experience that day when they realize their child has lost some of his or her innocence. Due to their own sin and the sins of others, they become aware of a world that in many ways is broken, and disappointment, guilt, shame, and separation become a part of their lives. It is inevitable, and it seems to be happening earlier and earlier in the lives of our children. **B. Next, sin kills IDEALS.** Many a missionary has spoken of their experience of adjustment when they return to the United States after being away for 4 years. One of their struggles was that they were vividly aware, EACH time they returned, of the lowering moral standards in America. An accompanying struggle was that as they spoke of this to their adult children living in America, their children didn't even seem aware of any changes. Our sin, and the sins of others, can numb our conscience, and what we once clearly saw as sin seems to be accepted as normal. **C. Finally, sin kills THE WILL.** Have you ever noticed how sin, left unchecked, will often progress from being OCCASIONAL, to REGULAR, to HABITUAL, to NECESSITY, to SLAVERY? ILLUSTRATION: Oscar Wilde was a brilliant man who lived a tragic life. Playwright, dramatist, and poet, Wilde once heard his mother say to a younger man, "When you are as old as I am, young man, you will find out that the only thing worth living for is sin." Wilde took her advice to heart, the effects overwhelmed him, and he died at age 46. Near the end of his life he wrote, "The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensation. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. I ceased to be lord over myself, I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace." Wilde lost his will to fight sin and it killed him. Wilde's mother said, "The only thing worth living for is sin." God said, "The wages of sin is death." Whenever you ask yourself if your life really needs to be flipped, remember these words

of Paul... "ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Each of us NEEDS to be flipped!

2. **Question #2: Can I flip my own life?** Since I have only watched "Flip That House" on occasion, I have missed most of the episodes. However, I think I can confidently state that they have never had an episode where the house flipped itself! I don't think we will ever see the show's host and that week's "flippers" visit a broken down home filled with trash, rotting lumber, mold, broken pipes and shag carpet, buy it and leave doing nothing, expecting to return in two months to find a practically new, attractive home that will earn them a quick hundred grand! That would be absurd, wouldn't it? It's just as absurd to think we can flip our own life! A house is inanimate. It can't move. It can't think. It can't do home repairs. Dead people are also inanimate, and Paul writes that his friends in Ephesus, before God flipped their lives, were dead in their transgressions and sins. As if that wasn't clear enough, he also wrote that his friends were by nature objects of God's wrath. It is precisely because of the severe nature of sin's effect upon our lives that we must accept the reality that no one can buy salvation through sweat equity! We also need to consider a very important implication of this truth. If we can't flip our own lives, we certainly need to be cautious in thinking we can flip somebody else's life. It's not our job! We are not called by God, or capable of, flipping the life of a spouse, child, parent, boss, friend or neighbor. We can, however, INFLUENCE them. We can LOVE them. We can FORGIVE them. We can provide them with a GODLY EXAMPLE. We can SERVE them. We can PRAY for them. But ONLY GOD can "flip" them and transform their lives.
3. **Question #3: What tools does God use to flip our lives?** Have you ever noticed how having the right tool makes a difficult job so much easier and the result so much better? More than once I have worked on some problem at our home, only to surrender and call a pro. He comes over and invariably pulls out some tool I have never seen before, and it is the perfect tool he needs to fix what is broken. I wonder why I don't have that tool...I think it's a conspiracy! Have you ever worked on some problem in your life only to finally surrender and call God for help? Notice how He seems to have exactly the perfect tool He needs to fix what is broken in your life? Ephesians 2 talks about 4 of the tools God uses in flipping lives: Verse 4 speaks of the **MERCY** and **LOVE** God uses in renovating our lives. Verses 5, 7 & 8 speak of the tool of **GRACE**, and verse 7 talks about the tool of **GOD'S KINDNESS**. That is a wonderful set of tools, and they have a profound impact. I am also a bit surprised at what is NOT on the list. God has other tools available, like judgment, anger and guilt, but they are not mentioned. I mentioned earlier that, while we cannot flip the lives of others, we can influence them. I think we'd be smart to follow God's example and first pull the tools of love, mercy, grace, and kindness out of our relational tool belt. Use them, and watch God work! There is a FIFTH TOOL that must be mentioned, and Paul writes about it in the end of Ephesians chapter 1, in verses 18-20 – the **SAME POWER THAT RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD** and seated him at the right hand of God the Father in heaven is the power God uses to flip our lives and give us a hope!
4. **Question #4: What is it like to be flipped by God?** A favorite reason for watching "Flip That House" is to watch the flippers and see if their friendship or marriage survives the process. Flipping is hard work, it almost always takes longer and costs a lot more than expected, mistakes are made, and many a person wonders why they ever thought they could do this and if they are in the middle of a disaster about to happen. When God flips our lives we probably will experience many of the same feelings. It will at times be hard work. True growth and maturity always takes longer than we'd like, and there will be some costs involved. Even GOOD change can be difficult. We will make multiple mistakes, at times we'll wonder if it is worth it, and if He knows what He is doing! We also need to remember one important fact about how God flips lives: While it may take just weeks or months to flip a house, God will take THE REST OF OUR LIVES to complete the process of flipping. You are much more important than a house, AND His finished product is going to last forever!
5. **Question #5: What does a flipped life look like?** Most every house is unique in some way, especially when people apply their tastes and preferences. Similarly, each of us were originally created by God as unique individuals, one of a kind, and God will work in unique and special ways as He flips our lives. However, there are some general characteristics of God's work and our lives that we all share as God works to transform our lives. Four words can be used to partially describe what a flipped life looks like: **A. Stunning** – after all, we are God's workmanship. Most everyone loves a good story. I love the stories that speak of the many ways that God flips a person's life – like a good testimony where Jesus is exalted. It's amazing what God can do with "damaged goods." The before and after can take your breath away! **B. Humble** – if we take any time at all to consider who we were and who we have become, the only appropriate response is grateful humility. ILLUSTRATION: Jonny Lang is a Midwesterner who hit the national music scene as a blues guitarist and vocalist at the age of 15. He

lived the hard life of a rock star for a number of years, as a teenager, and then a number of years ago God met him. He's an "old man" of 26 now, and his latest CD contains a song called "Only a Man." Here are the lyrics... "I used to live my life in fear, was worried all the time, from waking up to laying down, I had no peace of mind. The world became a darkened place, a struggle without end, although bitter times those were, the days that I had begun to understand, I was only a man. I grew up singing songs in church, with questions in my mind, and turned my back and ran away, from God who gave me life. Then one night His presence fell, I wept and shook and then, I fell down and cried 'Dear Jesus, rescue me again, I understand, I am only a man.'" **C. Active** – we respond in gratitude through active service. As Ephesians 2:10 says, we have been created – "flipped" – in Christ Jesus, to do good works. **D. Effective** – as we actively respond to God's work in our lives we will make a significant impact on this world because of God's meticulous and personal work of preparation in our lives. Don't forget...God didn't just create us. He also has created specific works for us to do, aligned with who we are, and bound to make an impact for His glory in this world.

- 6. Conclusion.** After all that has been said in these past few moments, I want us to close by focusing on two, short, 3-letter words...**"But God."** "But God" is the heart of the message of Paul in Ephesians chapter 2. We can't flip our lives...**BUT GOD** can! If you have already been flipped and have experienced God's transforming work in your life – celebrate with gratitude! If you have not yet asked God to flip your heart and life, I invite you right now to do so. It'll be a lot more exciting than some TV show!