

Lost & Found Center Teaching Series



# THE LITTLE PICTURE

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### Introduction

Today our focus is what I call the little picture. **The Big Picture** is what it all means. That was a study I did a few weeks ago. The little picture is what it means to us. The **Big Picture** is about the purpose of man. The little picture is about our purpose, yours and mine.

**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.** Romans 12:2 NIV

Many of us know this verse, but let's not read it too quickly. There is a lot here, so much so that it can be difficult to take in during a single study, but we'll try. There are three logical sections in this verse. Let's call these sections: **preparation, testing and classification.**

### Preparation

**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

First, the Lord is telling us what to do, or actually want not to do. He says do not conform to the pattern of this world. Do not allow yourself to be fashioned or molded into the world's image; the world's standard. The Greek word for conform is "**suschematizo**". This is where we get our word schema. Schema means the underlying structure of something. Don't allow your underlying structure to be arranged or shaped or molded after the world's design.

First it says don't allow yourself to be shaped. Then it says to be transformed. The word for transform is "**metamorphoo**" from which we get the word metamorphosis. The caterpillar to butterfly is the classic example of a metamorphosis.

The word of God is saying stop allowing yourself to be shaped by one thing and start allowing yourself to be shaped by something totally different.

It doesn't stop there. The Bible states how this transformation occurs. It says be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That word renewing is "**anakainosis**" and it means literally renovation. So let's put this together now.

Stop letting yourself be shaped by the world's design and start letting yourself be re-shaped by the renovation of what you can now understand and grasp.

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I'm emphasizing: "let yourself." I'm emphasizing that you don't do it. This is a common theme in all of my studies. The distinction between who does the work is one of the key subtleties of the Christian life that we need to master. Don't allow yourself to be continually shaped by the world, but allow yourself to be reshaped. If we read it any other way we put it in the category of a spiritual discipline. It becomes one of those nice verses with a major "to-do" list. We make it into a discipline that we can never achieve. This unfortunately is how this verse is often preached. We make it into a religious exercise bound up with frustration. Can you see this?

How then do you stop letting yourself be shaped according to the world's image? That's the first question. How then do you allow yourself to be remade? That's the second question. This is almost enough for a good Bible study. If we can just get to the point of asking these questions we've accomplished something. That's because they are both very good questions: worthy of our thoughts and prayers. May the power of the Holy Spirit help us overcome concepts (strongholds) that keep us from searching and examining and yes, asking good questions.

The answer is in the previous verse in Romans.

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.**

Romans 12:1 NIV

Your highest form of worship is to present yourself to God, to do to you what he desires. Present yourself to God so he can change you. He will be able to transform you.

I haven't talked much about the concept of dying yet in my studies, but it is one of the keys to the Christian life. For all the complexity in our universe there are only two states of being: part of the life of God or not part of the life of God. There is a spiritual dimension that is not part of the life of God. It is the domain where the enemy of God exerts his influence. Anyway, as I stated there are only two states of being in this universe. If we are alive to one of these states then we are dead to the other. We can't be alive to both.

So either we are alive to God and dead to the world or we are alive to the world and dead to God. Both life and death are of critical importance in the Christian life.

The Lord said:

**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.** Matthew 16:25 NIV

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He is saying that whoever saves his life to the world loses it to God but whoever loses his life to the world establishes it to God. Can you see this?

So do not let yourself be, but let yourself be. Be alive to one thing and dead to something else. Be plugged into one thing and unplugged from something else. Be in tune with one thing and out of tune with something else. Be alive to God through Jesus the Christ and dead to the world through that same person Jesus the Christ. Isn't that cool? Did you get that?

**May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** Galatians 6:14 NIV

This is the answer to the questions: "How then do you stop letting yourself be shaped according to the world's image?" and "How then do you allow yourself to be remade?"

### Testing

**Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is...**

The next section of Romans 12:2 is called the testing section. The Lord wants to get us to a state where we can test and approve what we think is his will. Can you see why preparation is important? Can you see why we can't skip this step? Preparation puts us in the proper frame of reference so we can test.

He wants us to examine and test and validate his will. Yes, God's will in your life requires testing. It requires validation. It requires examination.

*The little picture requires testing.*

Testing is not a sin. Testing should be guilt free. Testing does not demonstrate lack of faith. Testing is just an acknowledgement that God's ways really are higher than our ways. Testing acknowledges that God's thoughts really are higher than our thoughts. Testing is important. Testing protects us.

Why don't we test? Good question.

### Control

A lot of times we don't test when we want to control the outcome. We don't like to test when we have our minds already made up. We don't like to test when we are invested in a particular outcome and we really don't want to know what God thinks. We don't test when we lean on our understanding and think we have everything figured out and we don't want to risk putting this decision up for grabs.

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### Fear

We don't test because we are afraid. It goes back to control. We are afraid that God does not want what we want. We are afraid that the result won't be what we want at all. Deep down some of us are afraid that the thing God wants us to do will be our worst fear.

### Confusion

Some of us are just confused and tied up in knots from years of bad teaching. We think that testing is a sign of lack of trust. That's how "con" men work. They get you to commit your resources to people or projects you haven't investigated simply because of their word. And they get you to an emotional state so you think you are insulting them if you test them.

Understand, the enemy doesn't like testing.

**Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.** 1 John 4:1 NIV

Do you believe me now? The Lord desires us to seek his direction in our lives. Now many times those directions are not clear. When that occurs don't blame yourself or think less of yourself. Things are often not clear for a reason. Things are often not clear because God has purposely made them unclear. He wants you to seek clarity. He wants you to test things and look for his will.

In the little picture of our lives the Lord wants to take us to a place where we do not have our mind made up in which direction we should go. He wants to get us to a place where we are not fully invested in some decision and are not just looking for his agreement. He wants us to be open to the possibility that he may have other ideas with our lives, even things we haven't thought of. He wants us to "**test and approve**" what his will is.

### Classification

#### ...his good, pleasing and perfect will

Good, pleasing and perfect represent the levels of God's will if I could dare say such a thing. I touched on this in my teaching **The Big Picture**. But in **The Little Picture** I want to come from a slightly different angle. I like to use the analogy of the house of God. Consider yourself in the house of God, as a child living by higher levels of his will.

### Good

The first level of God's will are those things that are good. Think good - think principles. We start off in the house of God following the principles of the house. You could call

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them the rules. God has established through his word principles that we should live by. When living in God's house we shouldn't have to ask our father every time we do things. Many times all we need to do is follow the rules. The good will of God is living based upon God's principles.

For some that's all they do. They never really think to pray and seek God in decision making, as long as they follow God's general principles. Following God's principles is good of course. This is however the lowest level of God's will. This may not make sense but things should clear up in the next level.

So think good - think principles. Operate by principles and you operate in the good will of God. This is how all children start out in the household of God.

### Pleasing

In the first level I said: think good - think principles. The next level is pleasing. Think pleasing - think intent. When we grow up in a household we start off by getting a lot of rules to follow. If we follow those then things are good. Make sense?

There comes a time though, in our growth, when we elevate above just rule followers. There comes a time when we can see the reasons or the intent of the rules and live accordingly. Do you see this? When we don't need a rule spelled out for us but we understand the intent behind it – that is pleasing.

Think about Jesus' ministry on the earth. He walked around de-mystifying God or showing what God was really like. Here is Jesus' response to the greatest commandment:

**"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:36-40 NIV**

He is saying that by embracing love for God and neighbor you embrace the intent of the entire law. Pleasing is embodying God's intent more than just following rules. Jesus went around extensively explaining not the letter of the law but the intent of it. When we live according to what God intends without following any specific rule - that is pleasing.

Here's a verse to go back to the child analogy. The Lord is leading us to be like him, to embody his qualities, to understand his intent. This is what Paul urges to the Ephesians when he says:

**Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children** Ephesians 5:1 NIV

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He is saying to try to embody the characteristics of your father. He says this in another way to the Galatians:

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**  
Galatians 5:22-23 NIV

He is saying here that when you embody these characteristics of God through the Holy Spirit, there is no set of rules that you need to follow. You automatically follow them all. What I'm saying is the next level of God's will is not about operating by principles, but by understanding the intent of the rules and thus by trying to emulate the character of God. Just think of growing up in a household where you not only follow the rules but you begin to emulate the character of God. You begin to think about what pleases God. You begin to move through the house with less fear about the rules, because you begin to understand the character of your father and why the rules are what they are. This is operating in the pleasing will of God. Now there doesn't seem to be a higher level, does there? But there is.

### Perfect

Okay, so at this point I've said: think good - think principles; think pleasing - think intent. Lastly when you think perfect - think plans.

I will now echo thousands of Bible teachers and preachers to say that God has a plan for your life. This is the essence of **The Little Picture**.

**For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.** Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

The Lord has plans for us: big plans that encompass all humanity and little plans just for you and I.

Many of you know this verse but I want to add this idea. If you develop plans for a child or a family or a corporation or a nation, at some point in the successful execution of those plans, there must be a transition of ownership. The plans for a child need to become the plans of a child for things to get done. The plans for a family need to become the plans of a family. The plans for a corporation or a nation need to become the plans of a corporation or of a nation. In the business world we call this concept "buy-in." Buy-in means the plans made by the executive team become the plans of the individual worker. Do you see this? How many plans can be successful without "buy-in"?

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At some point in time God wants his plans for us to become our plans for us. There's a word for that in the spiritual realm. It is called perfect.

### A Little More on Plans

Going back to our house analogy. Principles are what you follow. Pleasing is embodying the intent of those principles. Perfect is embracing Gods plans for you. Another word for plans is calling.

So much has been written and said about your plans or your calling. I have even addressed an aspect of it in my study called **Destiny, Seeds and Blessings**. Here is my latest definition of your calling.

*Your calling is how you have been designed to participate in the expression of who God is.*

So think of the little picture as your part in the body of Christ. The Bible says that we, you and I, are part of the body, those of us who have put our trust in Christ. We are now part of an extension of him, and yes, we do have a role, and no, most of you do not need to quit your jobs - only some of you. Part of the exploration of where we fit in this body is to be one of the goals of our lives. That's part of what church is all about. Who are you really, if you have accomplished some measure of success according to this world's systems but have been so consumed by it, so dominated by it, that you have never contemplated the part you play in the body of Christ – which is the expression of God?

So this is about your calling, your plans: your part in the body of Christ.

Can you see this? The Lord wants to lead us through different levels of his will, from living a life based on principles, which is good, to living a life based upon God's intent, which is pleasing, to living a life based upon God's plans for us, which is perfect.

### Plans/Calling

We could stop here but please allow me to press on with one more key verse. The question is what are his plans? His plans require exploration and testing. There is a nice verse that lays it out rather systematically. Paul is talking to the Thessalonian church and he says this:

**With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 2 Thessalonians 1:11 NIV**

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The key words in this verse are calling, purpose and act. Does this look like a hierarchy to you?

Calling – Purposes – Acts

We see from this verse it implies a single calling with multiple purposes and multiple acts. Let's write it again as follows.

			Calling					
		Purpose	Purpose	Purpose				
Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts

As stated earlier your calling is how you have been designed to participate in the expression of who God is. Your purposes are the specific things that God desires you do. The sum total of those things is your calling. Your purposes, you could say is the living out of your calling. The acts would be the steps that are needed to accomplish the purposes. It sounds like a nice project plan doesn't it?

How about an example? Okay. Let's say you are called to be a prophetic minister. That is the overall call of your life. That's how you think. When you go in church you squirm because you've got stuff to say. When you meet people you get thoughts in your head about them. So you understand that purpose comes with a calling. Your calling is not something you just have and sit around and talk about to your friends. Seek a purpose for that calling. Think of these as tasks that support the overall project plan. Actively seek those. For some of us they have already been planted in our heart. For some of us they are with us right now.

Maybe you should be joining your church ministry team or becoming part of a bible study that encourages the prophetic or starting something yourself or finding a church that is more open to your expression. I can't say which but that's what prayer is all about. Then there are the acts. These are the steps that support your purpose. What do you have to do to fulfill your purpose? What are the steps you need to take to get there? Hope this doesn't look like a "to-do" list. I'm just explaining this verse.

So let's look at this verse again but with my comments.

**With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling,**

Paul first prays that you would be up to the task for the calling God has placed upon your life. This is a good prayer for all of us. We start with a calling. Remember the calling is made up of purposes.

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**and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours**

Paul then prays for the power of God so that God may fulfill every purpose in support of your calling. Notice it says “purpose of yours.” Remember “buy-in.” His plans become your plans. His purposes become your purposes.

**and every act prompted by your faith.** 2 Thessalonians 1:11 NIV

Paul prays that by God’s power will also fulfill every act that supports those purposes. Those are acts of faith aren’t they? Those are steps we need to take to accomplish our purposes. They require faith. The only way to accomplish anything in the kingdom is through faith. The only things that have value are acts of faith that have been motivated by love.

So there is the pattern: Calling – Purposes – Acts.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion **The Little Picture** is about being alive to God and dead to the world. It is about getting to this state so we can test and see what God’s will really is. It is about us growing up as a child of God and transitioning from living a life based upon rules, to one based upon intent, to one based upon our embracing the plans God has created for you. It is about the power of God helping us to fulfill our purposes and the acts of faith that support our calling. That’s the little picture. May the Lord give us the power, the encouragement and the hope for this journey. Amen.

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### Notes

For Questions or Comments please respond to [lostandfoundcenter@yahoo.com](mailto:lostandfoundcenter@yahoo.com) and visit [www.lostandfoundcenter.org](http://www.lostandfoundcenter.org) for additional information.

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