

**Discerning the Will of God**  
**Being Transformed by Inviting the Will of God**  
Lesson 1

**This week's main objective:** Explore how God forms His people for His holy purposes.

**Purpose:** This series of lessons will focus on God's role in shaping, forming, and directing his people and the role of his people to be aware of God's working out of his purposes for His creation. The emphasis will be on recognizing God's will and acting as the body of Christ to accomplish His will. While we acknowledge that God has a will for each person's life, this series of lessons concerns God's will for his chosen people collectively.

**Principle teaching points:**

1. God's will transforms His people.
2. God is still writing the story of His creation as He works through His people to carry out His will.
3. How does God mold us into His will?

**Guiding scriptures:** Romans 12:2; Isaiah 46:8-10; Amos 3:7; Jeremiah 18:1-10; Romans 9:19-21

**1. Main teaching point 1: God's will transforms His people.**

**Romans 12:2** "Do not conform 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."

- a. Spiritual discernment is the ongoing process of perceiving and recognizing the will of God and includes distinguishing among options. To invite the will of God is to open oneself to wanting, accepting, and acting on God's desires, and thus, discernment is entwined with transformation. God has told us that He intends to change us to suit His purposes.
- b. Too often, we live our lives as if we are in control. We think in terms of our time, our energy, our intelligence and wisdom, our foresight, and our resources. We take pride when our plans succeed, and we are disappointed and depressed when our plans fail. We worry when we feel that we are not sufficient for the task ahead of us.
- c. When we invite Christ to be the Lord of our lives, our minds become transformed. But who is doing the transformation? Thankfully, the job is not left up to us. No fallen creature can make the transformation God intends for His people. This is not a self-improvement project. The testing and approving of God's will happens as the effect of our minds having been transformed as we are added to the body of Christ. The ongoing transformation advances throughout our lives as the gift of the Holy Spirit works to form in us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control making us able to act in faith, hope, and love.

**2. Main teaching point 2: God is still writing the story of His creation as He works through His people to carry out His will.**

**Isaiah 46:8-10** "Remember this, and be assured. Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'"

- a. Genesis recounts God's creation of the universe and all that is in it. Isaiah says that from the very beginning God has known the story of His creation.

- b. God did not stop working after the sixth day of creation. He did not stop forming and influencing His creation to achieve His goals. And in His ongoing work, He has not kept His will a mystery from His people.

**Amos 3:7** “Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, except He reveal His secret unto His servants the prophets.”

1. God is steering His creation to His own ends. He does not hide His actions from His people, but reveals his plans through those who are blessed with discernment, wisdom, and understanding.
2. Throughout the Bible, God chooses people to achieve His ends. One astounding example is the calling of Abraham, the birth of Isaac, and the growth of Jacob (Israel) to a great nation. Looking back, we can see the work of God as He shapes frail, imperfect, and inconsistent people into a nation that brings forth His son. The Old Testament recounts the abject failures and glorious successes of the nation of Israel, the curses they endured and blessings they received, and their faithlessness to God and their restoration as His people.

**Jeremiah 18:1-10** This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: <sup>2</sup>“Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. <sup>4</sup> But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. <sup>5</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to me. <sup>6</sup> He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. <sup>7</sup> If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, <sup>8</sup> and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. <sup>9</sup> And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, <sup>10</sup> and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

- a. This uneven history of Israel as a nation is illustrated in Jeremiah 18:1-10. In this story, God shows Jeremiah that He is the one that makes Israel, shapes it to His will, destroys it, and remakes it to serve His purpose.
- b. Here, God tells His people that He will form them according to His will and that the form they take and the use to which they are put will depend on their obedience. The potter is actively creating what he will, responding to the clays’ responsiveness to his voice. God designs what he chooses in light of the clay’s moldability. One cannot blame the potter for the result.
- c. In Isaiah 29:16, the prophet states, “You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker; He did not make me’; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding’?”
- d. And in Isaiah 45:9, “Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘The potter has no hands’?”

**Romans 9:19-21** “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ On the contrary, who are you, you foolish person, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this, will it? Or does the potter not have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one object for honorable use, and another for common use?’”

1. Lest we think that these metaphors only apply to Israel, Romans 9 picks up the same image to apply it under the new covenant.
2. Some people in history have been used to display God's wrath. Others have listened to God and been included in displaying God's glory. Whatever the starting point, in Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit allows re-forming of the clay to be in the likeness of Christ.
3. God forms all people throughout all of history, not only His chosen. His right to form a people does not require their consent. We will all be formed by God to suit His purpose, though we all have invitations to be formed into the body of Christ. Because of this, we have the possibility of being shaped into a chosen people used by God through the work of His son to reconcile His creation to Him.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What should be our attitude toward the passive (or pliant) position we have in this relationship?
2. If God chooses to use us as an example of His love, how should we regard this?
3. God makes some objects of His displeasure (Jeremiah 26: 1-6, Isaiah 65:11-15, Revelation 2:12-16, Revelation 2:18-23; Revelation 3:1-3; Revelation 3:14-19). If God chooses to use us as an example of His displeasure, how should we regard this? What is our responsibility regardless of what God intends for His church?

### **3. Main teaching point 3: How does God mold us into his will?**

The first verse of the song "Have Thine Own Way, Lord" gives us some clues to guide us into being clay that delights the potter. "Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way. Thou are the potter. I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will. While I am waiting, yielded, and still."

1. In order to be conformed to the will of God, we must 1) wait for Him, 2) be yielding to His influence, and 3) be still, i.e. get our plans out of His way.
2. When one accepts Christ, one invites the potter's hands to continue to reform the clay far beyond what one could envisage. The Holy Spirit continuously forms the mind of Christ, the valuing of faith, hope, and love, and provides the fruit of the Spirit in individual believers and in the community of believers.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Hillcrest and its members will continually feel pressure to change. How can you tell if this is the transforming will of God or the conforming power of the world?
2. What does it mean to "wait on God"? (Look for, hope, and expect the Lord to come through)
3. What does it mean to "yield to God"? (To let go of your own will in readiness to submit to God's will)
4. What does it mean to "be still"? (To stop struggling, drop your defensiveness, and welcome God's guidance)
5. Which is harder for you, waiting, yielding, or being still?
6. We look forward to next week, when we will explore how humility in discerning God's direction is required for accurately understanding His will, and how pride functions as a barrier to the same.

We look forward to next week, when we explore **Humbly Seeking Discernment**.