

LESSON 11

Living Differently

The world is always trying to press you into its shape. God is forming a different one in you, from the inside out.

The Gospel Reshapes Your Values, Habits, and Priorities.

WATCH BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Scan to watch the Lesson 11 teaching video – a 12-minute companion to this lesson.

CORE SCRIPTURE

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

—Romans 12:1-2

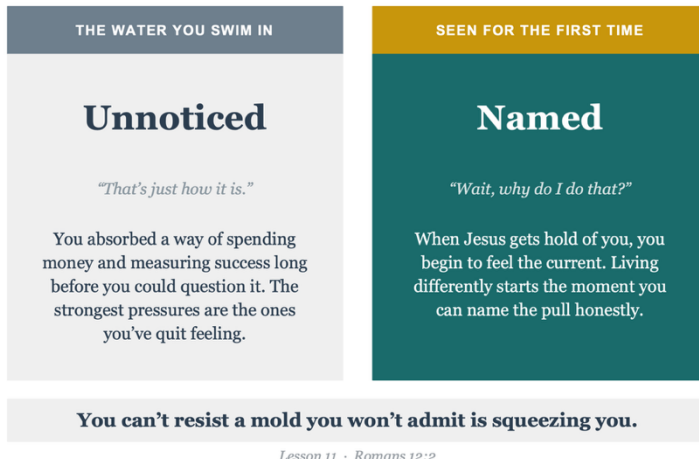
The Pressure You Stopped Noticing

Nobody hands you a rulebook for how to be a normal person. You just absorb it. Growing up, you picked up what success looks like, what's worth wanting, and which people are worth admiring. You didn't decide most of it. It seeped in from the people and screens around you until it felt less like an opinion and more like just reality.

The hardest pressures to resist are the ones you've stopped noticing. A fish doesn't know it's wet. You and I rarely notice the current we're swimming in, the steady assumption that more is better, and that a comfortable life is the thing worth organizing everything around. We just call it normal and keep paddling.

FIGURE 11.2

The Current You Stopped Feeling



Then Jesus gets hold of you, and slowly you begin to feel the current for the first time. A way of spending money, or of talking about people, that used to feel automatic starts to feel off. That discomfort isn't you becoming uptight. It's you waking up to water you didn't know you were in.

DISCUSSION: What's one thing your surrounding culture treats as obviously normal that you've started to feel differently about since following Jesus? Where did the old assumption come from?

Begin with the Mercies

Before Paul asks anyone to live differently, he gently reminds us of God's mercy. "Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship" (Romans 12:1).

In view of the mercies of God. Everything that follows stands on that. Paul has spent eleven chapters piling up everything God has done in Christ to rescue and claim you. Only then does he say, so, here's how to live. How Paul organized the letter to the Romans is essential to see. You are not living differently to earn God's mercy. You are living differently because you have already received it.

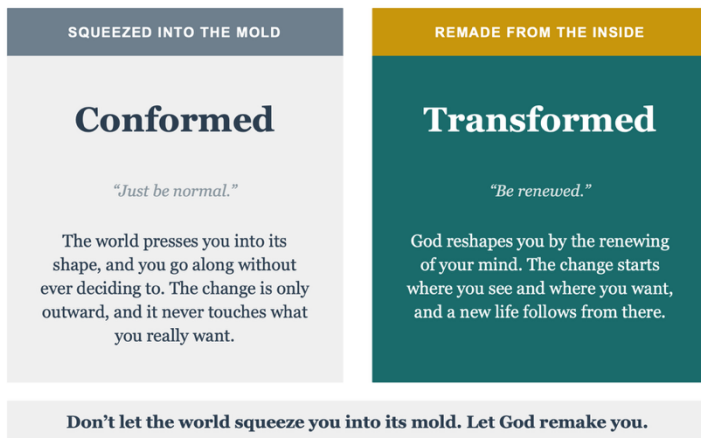
That reframes the word sacrifice, too. Paul says present yourself as *a living sacrifice*, your whole ordinary self, handed over to God. That isn't God demanding payment. It's the most reasonable response a rescued person can make. When you finally grasp what you were saved from, handing him your entire life, stops feeling like a loss and starts to feel like worship.

DISCUSSION: Does "living differently" tend to feel like earning God's approval or responding to it? What changes when "in view of the mercies of God" comes first?

Don't Be Squeezed In

FIGURE 11.1

Conformed or Transformed?



Lesson 11 · Romans 12:1-2

never looks like renouncing your faith. It looks like your calendar quietly filling with the same things everyone else is chasing. Or wanting whatever the ads told you to want, then feeling privately ashamed of the parts of your life that don't match the feed. Somewhere along the way you pick up the easy cruelty in how everyone talks about people they disagree with. Things pass along, gently and constantly, and a Christian who isn't being transformed simply hardens into the surrounding shape.

Living differently begins with understanding the pressure you face. You can't resist a mold you won't admit is squeezing you.

DISCUSSION: Where do you feel the squeeze most: money, image, busyness, the way you talk about people, something else? What does conforming there actually look like in a normal week?

Now the expectations. "Do not be conformed to this age" (Romans 12:2). Some translations carry the sense of not letting the world press you into its mold, like dough pushed into a cutter and coming out whatever shape the cutter decides. That's the danger Paul names. Left alone, you will take the shape of whatever surrounds you. Conformity isn't usually a decision you make; it's what happens by default when you stop paying attention.

And it's rarely dramatic. It almost

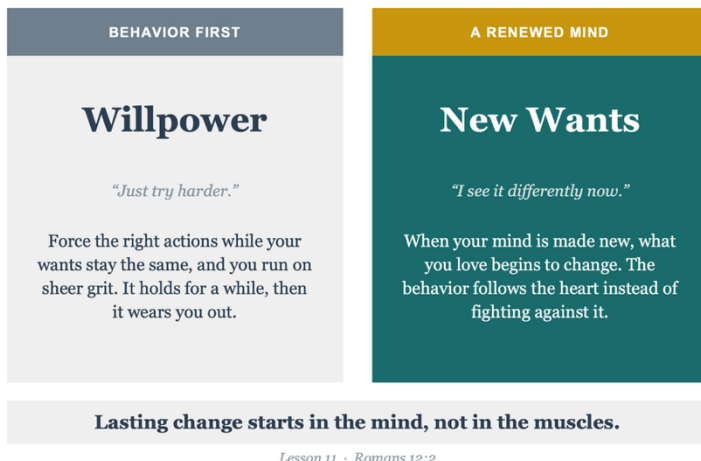
A Mind Made New

As we continue in verse 2, see how Paul doesn't say resist the world by trying harder. He says, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Notice where the change starts. Not first in your behavior, but in your mind, in how you see. A renewed mind is one that has spent enough time with God's reality that it slowly stops believing the culture's headlines. You read the Scripture, you pray, you sit among God's people, and over months the things

FIGURE 11.3

Where Change Starts



you assumed were obvious start to look strange, while the things God says start to look true. Then the behavior follows, almost on its own, because you desire something different now.

This is why willpower alone wears people out. You can force a behavior for a while, but if your wants never change, you're just gripping the wheel against your own desires until your hands cramp. Transformation runs the other way. Change what a person loves and believes is real, and new

habits grow out of it the way leaves grow from a healthy root. Your part is to keep putting your mind where God can renew it. The renewing is his.

DISCUSSION: What's one input shaping how you see the world more than Scripture does right now? What would it look like this week to put your mind somewhere God can renew it?

A City on a Hill

One more thing, because a different life was never meant to be a private hobby. Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:13–14). A transformed life is not something you can keep to yourself even if you try. It shows.

But notice what it's for. Jesus doesn't say live differently so people will admire how disciplined you are. He says, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The point of your changed life isn't to make you look good. *It's to make God look good.* Salt was never meant for itself; it's for the meal.

So, you don't have to advertise the difference, and you certainly don't have to perform it. You just live it, in plain sight, and let people draw their own conclusions about the God who is quietly remaking you. Some of the most powerful witness a new Christian ever gives is simply a life that no longer fits the mold, lived where the neighbors can see.

DISCUSSION: Name one place — work, home, online — where the people around you can actually see your life. What would it look like there to let the light shine without performing it?

Looking to Jesus

If you want to see what refusing the mold looks like, watch Jesus on the day his disciples were jockeying for position.

FIGURE 11.4
Climb or Stoop?

<div style="background-color: #2c3e50; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">THE WORLD'S WAY</div> <h3 style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">Climb</h3> <p style="text-align: center; font-style: italic;">"Lord it over them."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Greatness means rising above people and being served, holding the best seats. Everyone is quietly jockeying for position.</p>	<div style="background-color: #f1c40f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">"NOT SO AMONG YOU"</div> <h3 style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">Stoop</h3> <p style="text-align: center; font-style: italic;">"The great one serves."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus turns it over. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life. A transformed life bends low.</p>
<p>The world says climb. Jesus says stoop.</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: #7f7f7f;">Lesson 11 · Mark 10:42-45</p>	

Two of them had just asked for the best seats in the kingdom, and the other ten were furious, probably because they wanted those seats too. It was the most ordinary human scene imaginable: a roomful of people angling to come out on top. Jesus pulled them together and named the water they were swimming in. "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them" (Mark 10:42). That was the world's mold. Greatness

means climbing, and the higher you get, the more people answer to you.

Then four words that get to the heart of the matter: "But it is not so among you" (Mark 10:43). Not a tweak to the system. A different system entirely. "Whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all" (Mark 10:43-44). In the kingdom, the way up is down. Greatness is measured by how many people you serve, not how many serve you.

And Jesus didn't only teach it; he was it. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The most important person who ever lived spent himself on people who could give him nothing back, all the way to a cross.

That's the mold you're being pulled out of. The world says climb; Jesus says stoop. When your transformed life starts to look strange to people, this is often where it shows: you stopped competing for the top and started spending yourself on others, because that's the shape of the One you belong to.

REFLECTION: "It is not so among you." Where are you still playing by the world's rules for getting ahead, and what would serving look like there instead?

DON'T FORGET

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