

## **DIFFERENT VALUES IN AN UNHOLY CULTURE**

I was in 7th grade at a party for 8th graders. I had never wanted to fit in more in my life than in that moment - the younger kid away from the friends my age, wondering if I was cool enough to be accepted into this group that I looked up to. You ever been there? And then I found my shot. There was music playing in the background. And everyone knew me as the pastor's kid but that day I didn't want to be known as the pastor's kid, just a kid who blended in with the vibe of the party and all the other song selections being played. And so when a rock song came on that was not a particularly edifying, ok it was vulgar, and I thought now is my time. And so at the top of my lungs I flawlessly sang the refrain, without skipping a word or beat. And bingo. It worked. The group gave their nonverbal cues of acceptance. Some surprised, some complimenting me. Internally I was collecting all the cool chips I just picked up for my performance. Yes, it worked to prove I was not really different, just a kid among a lot of other kids who knew the refrain to that vulgar song. It proved I was normal.

And I tell you that story to bring up this point, *There is a lot of pressure to be normal.* So I think we all have stories of what we did with the pressures of trying to fit in, or blend in with the people around us. For you maybe not 7th grade, but around the water cooler at work. And the conversation isn't particularly edifying or good - could be a dirty joke or putting someone else down, but with the pressure of the scenario and cool kids leading the conversation you join in, or at least blend in. Or we have some school kids, maybe times haven't changed all too much and you find the pressure to fit into and sing songs, watch things, do things, say things so that perhaps that group will accept you. Maybe it was for that one person, only one you wanted to blend in and fit in with and it seemed you would do whatever to be accepted. So you put the cover over your moral compass, and let their idea of right guide your way.

But though there is this intense pressure to be normal and do and say what is expected. Can I say something about what the world is declaring normal, what is culturally normal? *Normal is broken path that leads to no where and leaves you with nothing.* Consider things that are normal but really broken paths. Normal is being broke, spending more than you make. Normal is addictions being a slave to something that may not be healthy for you whether it be alcohol, porn, spending, medications. Normal is unhealthy lifestyles too much food and too little activity, too much activity too little sleep. Normal is pursuing what makes me feel good, in spite of or without regard for how it makes you feel. Normal is sex outside of marriage, instead of purity before it. Normal is pursuing good things, but not the best things-not usually time with God. And in our American Culture which you could say is increasing in unholiness and making that the norm- *normal is a broken path that leads to no where and leaves you with nothing.*

You know Jesus spoke about the normal way of life here on earth. He did he said there is this wide path that many people take. It's normal. But look what he said, "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." (Matthew 7:13) So what is the solution? Jesus talked about this narrow gate, that is small and only a few find it. And those who find it are...different.

So today we're going to talk about being different. And to broach that topic, it reminds me of a car commercial I've seen recently. Maybe you've seen it as well, it's for Audi SUV. Now for me if you really want to stick out and stand out I think you should drive a Prius. Just saying. But the point of the commercial is the point of what we're going to talk about. How do we stand out, how are we going to be non-conformists to the broken record of what is normal. And I believe it's not going to be about the car we drive, the clothes we wear, or the color we dye our hair - but it's going to be what we do and how we act.

Ready to dive in. During this series we are diving into the book of 1 Peter. Last week we heard Peter remind us that we are strangers here on earth, that we are not home, and God allows trials and difficulties to remind us we are not home. Today we launch into more of his desires for us. Let's read 1 Peter. So there it is. Beautiful Gospel you were bought with the blood of Christ, and now you are called to be holy. Could you turn to the person next to you and say, "You're different."

One of the songs that swept across our nation was the song by Pharrell Williams called Happy. I know it's been a few years since it showed up on the Despicable Me 2 soundtrack. So to revisit that tune, here it is. And it's a good song, got a good beat, good lyrics. But the song's popularity identifies to me our American culture's fascination of happiness. I mean it is one of the most famous publications of this nation, the Declaration of Independence which states. We have unalienable rights here, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And pursuing it we are. You can find formulas, theories, and products that promise happiness. I was reading one article from the Business Insider about ideas over happiness. How it does produce greater happiness to give rather than receive. How money can make you happy but only to a point. They said around \$75,000 in this country you are happy and after that point it plateaus. How too much freedom of choice can make you unhappy. Illustrated by the difference between shopping at Walmart vs Trader Joes or Aldi. And finally how grudges actually do steal your happiness.

And I guess that is why I love today's lesson. Because God through the words of Peter is telling us to be happy. Be happy every moment of every day. Be happy at all costs. Be happy and pursue it with all you got. Or wait. Is that what he says? Verse 15. I got my words mixed up. Oh be holy. Well holy is different. Holy and happy are not necessarily the best dancing partners in the short term. Holy and happy don't always go together.

It reminds me of this science experiment of what happens when you mix coke and milk. Have you ever conducted this experiment? You put them together and over time you have this mix. Which doesn't look to me like good coke or good milk. It illustrates they really don't go together, and what you end up with is not good.

And isn't it true in our lives happiness and holiness don't always go together. For instance if I see something that I want when I am shopping, but I don't have the money. I can choose happiness which is overspending, or perhaps stealing. But that isn't holiness. If I want to have fun at night with my friends or on the weekend or on a date, if I want to feel good for a moment. That moment happiness may not mix well with holiness. If I'm in a relationship with someone and they hurt me by saying or doing something, or a marriage that doesn't make me happy. To get happy again may not mix with staying holy.

So if you want to be different which I believe God is calling us to be. *Different is pursuing holiness over immediate happiness.* When you come to the point when you know you can't have both. Pick the coke (holiness). Pick honoring God.

And at this point I look at God's ways and my way, and I'm like busted. I was reading v. 13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober. First of all girding your loins was lost on me. But here is an illustrated version of girding loins. Aka get your mind ready. It can also be translated with perfect self-control, or without excess passion. And I'm like perfect self control, no excess passion. Man. And now this emphasis about being holy, and non-conformist. Lord I'm lost. Are you there? Are you like Lord I'm lost, I can't do this different. I can't be exactly what you want.

Reminds me of the conversation I had with a representative, personal trainer at a gym. I was getting my body fat tested, and were chatting about health. And he was very nice telling me his philosophy of health and three legs of a table. The 3 legs of Cardio, strength training, and diet. And I'm like that's nice. I don't always do that, but it's a nice reminder. And the struggle really isn't in the what as it is the how. How do I always get all three of those right?

And for us today it's not really like holy what, but like holy how?

Can I share with you the good news. There was one who knew at some point or another you wouldn't be completely self-controlled. That you wouldn't be completely holy all the time. And here was his solution, to send for you a replacement. Someone to be holy in your place. Someone to be so holy and pure that it is said he was blameless, spotless, perfect. This perfectly holy one is Jesus Christ our Savior. And he saw us in our need. He saw how lost we were, and he purchased us. He bought us from an empty way of life, from a lostness. Not with all the silver and gold in the world, but with his blood shed on the cross. And this holy one says that all who believe in him, who trust in him, who cling to him for mercy are found holy in Him. And *being found in Christ you are beautifully different and holy.* See right now the Father looks down to all who cling to the cross and see us as holy children through faith. Not dirty, not shameful, not lost, but found in him. How glorious is this Gospel. And the world may never see us completely holy and perfected, but today and every day we walk in faith that's exactly how our Father sees us. All because of faith in the Holy One! May we never stray to far from this idea that all we need to be is found in Him and what He has done. Holy how? Holy in Christ. And how to be holy in this world - how about holy through Christ. *Holy in Christ and holy through Christ.* He says as we stay connected to him who is the vine and we as branches we will have power to produce fruit. But let's consider our posture.

Have you ever stayed as a guest in someone else's house, and it was someone your really respected. Well, let's say you stay overnight at their house. You sleep in their guest bedroom, you use their guest bathroom to get ready for the day and shower. You eat with them and hang out. If it is a clean house and you really respect them, you are going to do your best to be clean. Make the bed, even if you don't normally. Be conscientious in the bathroom area and try not to be disgusting - for guys this is inherently more difficult. Be polite and have manners. And why because they have your respect and you are a stranger in their home.

As we talk about being different I think this idea, this posture is what God is talking about. Look again at v. 17 Live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. *Different is living as guests with proper respect.* Because whose house are we guests in? Who is the host

who is above all, and sees all. It is our God. The one who is worthy of every ounce of respect and fear. The one who is greater than any A list celebrity, or person you currently idolize. We live our lives in his domain, and out of respect for him and when we do this we will live different.

Because isn't it true sometimes too comfortable is tied to less considerate. When I'm too comfortable I speak too freely about things that perhaps shouldn't be said. When I'm too comfortable I do things without considering how it makes the other person feel first. Too comfortable in your home is the person who with pristine white carpet doesn't offer to take off their muddy shoes or even consider it. So being different is being intentional. Being different is pausing before acting and speaking. Being intentional, respecting others.

But there is a clear ringer when it comes to being different. There is something so odd when it comes to the way of this world and the values found here, it will make statement. And the clear ringer is found in v.22 Love one another deeply, from the heart. But some of you are like how is that different. I mean people without God love other people, love their family, love their friends, sometimes even their co-workers. But being different is really about love itself as much as the quality of love. And I wanted to talk about 3 characters of this kind of love that will make you look different.

To start it off, I don't know if you've ever been in a relationship with someone where the one who cares the least wins. It's not an easy relationship to be in, but I believe it exists and so one tries a lot and the other tries not at all and still gets the attention. Or maybe you've been in a group of friends who gave off the impression it was cool not to care. Not to care about school work, or what your parents thought, or the laws of the land. It's cool not to care. This kind of mentality can be summed up by this cat meme. Cat meme to the rescue. "If I have said or done anything to hurt you... I don't care."

So what is a different love. A different love is a fervent love. Which is one way of translating what Peter said here. A different love is playing a different game, not who can care the least but who can care the most. And when you do this in your relationship with your spouse, when you do this with your friends and associates. When you do this for the people in your life that you have every reason to write off, and you make it a competition to care about them though they may not care as much about you. You will look different. In fact I dream of a church that reaches out loves people more deeply than they can every love in return, that for us in a church family to make it a goal to outdo one another in love.

But there's more in this type of love. I went to my aunt's funeral a couple of weeks ago and there I saw a former baseball teammate and his family. He had a few young daughters younger than my own, and I'll never forget the kindness of one of their daughters. For she was an eager hugger - ever met one of those. And I remember standing and talking with someone in the balcony and out of no where she jumps into my arms eager for me to catch her, and she gives me a hug. I realize this is something that kid's naturally do, depending on the disposition. But it made an impression on me.

When Peter is describing a different kind of love - it is like the love of that child. In a word it is eager. It's eager to show kindness, it's eager to compliment and build up, it's biting at the opportunity to catch someone off guard with the way and willingness of what it is. Because

normal is reluctance. Normal is you go first and maybe then I'll reciprocate, so what is different eagerly jumping to show someone a warmth of love that may even catch them off guard.

One final thing about love. I grew up with these round things called cd's, and the only problem with cd's is that if you didn't put them back in the case they could get scratched. I remember riding with a buddy in his sweet ford explorer, but he kept his cds outside of his case all over his car. On his dash, on the seats, on the floor. And what this meant is that if he ever wanted to play a cd or show me a song - it would skip pretty horribly. He was pretty used to it, because it was just the way he rolled but I still remember riding shotgun trying not to press forward on his radio because it was skipping so badly. Good song.

When you consider a skipping, or stuck song this represents a normal love. A love that plays for a while but gets stuck. Stuck because a hurt happens and there is an unwillingness to forgive. Skipping because sometimes I'm thinking about that individual and what is best, and sometimes I am not. Skipping because sometimes we just have a bad day and don't feel like. Skipping because though we had good intentions, only bad came out.

So Peter says you want to be different last adjective about love. Love continuously. Don't let the track skip. Keep showing up, be faithful, be present, be available. Be continuous in your love for one another and this will look different.

This whole discussion reminds me of another portion of the Bible when the disciple named Paul wanted to show everyone the most excellent way, the gift and trait to pursue above all things and so he wrote about love. But who best fits these descriptions of love. Fervent, Eager, Continuous. It's our Savior isn't it. Who wins the competition of caring every time, who is eager to shower you with mercies new every morning, who has never and will never fail in his love for you. Yes *Different is Christ-like love*.

May God so inspire you to leave the empty way of life called normal. And live a bit differently. May he remind you right now that you look different to you Father in heaven. May he empower by His Spirit to be different in all you do. Amen.