



Weirdos?-Part 1

How God Wants Us to Think Differently About Ourselves

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I was thinking about the first time I had visited this church. Believe it or not, it was 23 years ago that I first came here and visited. It wasn't your typical visit, though. Actually, our church was on a bike trip from our church in Long Beach to a church in San Diego, and we stayed at a couple churches along the way, and your church graciously opened up their doors and allowed us to come and stay there. I was 13, 14 years old, and we were on this trip, and it was a typical youth event, and we got in there, and we set up our sleeping bags in the basement. At this time, it was a building that was downtown at the time. Our church was downtown off of El Camino Real across from the old Albertson supermarket, and so we kind of got situated for the night, and all the counselors gave us their big, you know, spiel, and we got the speech, and the curfew, and the lights went out, and all that, and then they kind of went off into their other room and, you know, did whatever they were doing.

And so Steve and I decided to sneak out. And so right across the street was the supermarket. We thought it'd be really cool, get our money, and we'll go over to the supermarket. We'll buy, you know, Ding Dongs and Twinkies and those little lemon cakes that are really good, those lemon pie things. They still make those? Anyway, I was over there, I'm sure, going for one of those. And of course, we were free, and there was a little bit of guilt, and my heart was beating. But whatever. We were out there. We were free. We were doing our thing. We were cruising up and down the aisles of the supermarket when suddenly this Marine walked around the corner, and I tried not to stare, but I'm sure my eyes were bugging out of my head. I'd never seen anything like this before. This guy had obviously been in an accident or been beaten up. He had white medical tape on his nose. He had gauze around his head, and his face was completely swollen, and half of his face was literally black and blue. And around his eyes in particular, just dark black as I'd ever seen on a person's face.

And I looked at this guy and I tried not to stare. And I said to Steve, you know, "Did you see that guy?" "Oh yeah, I saw that guy." And the problem with seeing this guy and kind of squaring up with him is he realized he'd kind of spooked us. And so he thought he'd have some fun with us. And as we rounded the other corner, there he was again. And he started following us like this. And my goodness, we thought we were going to pee our pants. This guy's following us. What's going on in here? And we, you know, we took our candy, and I think we paid for it, and we rushed out the door, and I thought God had dispatched a demon from hell to, you know, send us back to church where we belonged. And, man, it was a frightening experience.

But I thought about it in retrospect. The older I got, I thought this guy must have got back to his barracks or his apartment or wherever he lived and just had a, you know, a laugh with his buddies as to how he scared the heebie-jeebies out of these kids, you know, and just tracked them like Frankenstein in the store. And I thought, you know, it was really funny. But I thought to myself, you know, it wouldn't have been so funny, and I'm sure he wouldn't have made light of it, had his weird looks, his grotesque face, had been permanent. I mean, for him, it was, you know, it was healing, and of course, he's back to normal now, I'm sure. But, you know, usually, if you're out of place, you tend to hide it. You don't want to show it off. Because all of us have this innate, you know, feeling and desire that we'd rather fit in. If we are a little weird, we want to keep it hidden.



It reminds me of that old Twilight Zone episode. I'm telling you a lot about my childhood now. My Twilight Zone episode, remember when they all got stuck in that little diner because there was snow, and snow was going on, and the bridges were out or whatever? So they're all in this diner, and then the sheriff comes in or whoever says it's been this spaceship that's landed and crashed. And so they all start suspecting there's an alien among them, and they're, you know, asking questions. And the jukebox is coming on and off. Do you remember it? It was just me that watched this show. Some of you remember that? All right. So there they are. They're trying to figure out who the alien is. You know, who's the alien? And, you know, everybody's suspecting each other and accusing each other.

When it's all said and done, and they all usher out, and the roads have been plowed, and the bridges have been fixed and everything, there's just two guys left, and the guy at the counter, and the counter guy, you know, that's there, he's having his cup of coffee. And all of a sudden, the guy you never expected, all of a sudden he gets a third arm comes out from his overcoat. You remember that? And he's drinking his coffee. He's got all these arms. And he says, "We're from Mars. We've come to colonize the earth." And, you know, I'm thinking this counter guy is going to freak out. But the guy behind the counter, he doesn't freak out. He looks at him and says, "You're too late." And he takes his hat, and you remember that? He pulls his hat back, and that third eyeball's sitting right there. And he says, "We're from Venus. We're already colonizing the earth," you know.

I share that only for one reason. There's a scriptural tie here. The Scripture actually, at the very least, at least two passages of Scripture, Hebrews chapter 11, 1 Peter chapter 2, calls us the very thing that Rod Serling had in mind when he put that episode together. He calls us, Scripture calls us, God calls us as Christians, aliens and strangers on this earth. What a strange thing to call aliens and strangers. And God's exhortation throughout the Bible has been that we would be aliens, not like Rod Serling's variety that likes to cover and hide our distinctiveness, but like Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount, that we would let our light so shine before men that they would see our good works. And then he gives us the upside of it. And some of them may glorify God. The downside is some people may just stare at us and think, you guys are weird. You're different. You're distinctive.

Worse than wanting to hide your distinctiveness as a Christian would be to lose some of your distinctiveness. And in Corinth, that's what Paul's concerned about. He's concerned about their being ashamed of it. He's concerned about them actually losing some of their distinctiveness.

I had a guy tell me he had a canary in a cage, and his canary sang really beautifully. I wouldn't know. I don't have any birds, but whatever. He said, "There's a beautiful canary, and it sings beautifully, and blah, blah, blah, blah." He said, well, in the spring last year, he decided to put his canary out on the upper deck of his home, on the second story of his home, to give it some fresh air and sunshine. So in the mornings, he was getting ready, he put his canary out there in the cage, and what he noticed was the sparrows started coming up and taking an interest in this canary. And at first, this canary, he said, was freaked out and didn't know what to do, but the canary eventually got comfortable with these sparrows, and they'd sit there and interact or whatever, do their bird thing, and there they were morning after morning.



And then eventually, he said, the owner of this canary said, “I realized when I’d bring that canary back into the house, he wouldn’t sing anymore. All he’d do is chirp like a sparrow.” He’d lost all his distinctive songs. Now all he did, like the annoying sparrows in the morning, all he’d do is sit there and just make, you know, chirping sounds. And I thought to myself that Paul’s concern for the church in Corinth is that their distinctiveness as people that are called out to be different than the rest of the world, that they don’t lose it, that they realize they are aliens and strangers. The biblical word for it is to be holy. Holy means that we’re different. We’re set apart. We’re like God. And the more we become like God in this world, the more the world’s going to say, “You guys are weird.”

And we need to be sure that we get comfortable with our weirdness, and not only comfortable with it, but like Jesus said, we even get used to showing it and demonstrating it and saying, “You know what? I’m going to let my light shine before men.” Now, I’m not talking about Christians that like to be weird for weirdness’ sake. You know people like that? You know, they just love to be different, and they’re going to try to be different. And I’m not talking about that. I’m just talking about that we toe the line biblically, that we live our lives the way Christ told us to, and that we recognize that we’re called to be distinctive.

One of the most classic passages on our distinctiveness, in Romans 12:2, Paul says, “Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your” what? “Mind.” You know that passage? By your mind. Now that just struck a chord in me as I saw the theme of 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and 2. I saw how he’s so concerned about holiness and sanctification. And I thought to myself, there’s got to be at least a way to look at this passage and see how the thinking of these people is supposed to be different. And I couldn’t get past the first verse without seeing how Paul’s thinking is distinctive from this world.

Take a look at it with me if you would. We’ll get the context, verses 1 through 3, in this morning. I just want to camp on the first verse as Paul is about to elaborate on our calling to be different. Actually, all 16 chapters, he’s going to be talking about how we are to be different than the people around us, than the society and culture and the values of the world we live in. But he begins with his opening by describing himself and his thinking. It just shows through. He says, “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.” Not by my will, he says, “but by the will of God.” And, he says, includes in his introduction, “and our brother Sosthenes. To the church,” look at verse 2, “of God in Corinth and to those sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Sanctified means they’re set apart, “called to be holy,” same word, different form, called to be different than others, “together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you,” traditional greeting, “grace and peace to you,” he says, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Traditional for Paul.

It is his way to say to these folks, listen, we are different. God has granted us some things. But before we even get to seeing the wealth of what’s in verses 2 and 3, just look at the distinctive way Paul introduces himself. And I say distinctive because the things that Paul says in the first verse are things that our society is increasingly having a difficult time, nay, an impossible time saying. Look at that verb. Paul says he is, look at the first verb there, “called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” That phrase right there is in our day increasingly more impossible for people to say. Because their philosophy of our world and of our life is so radically different than that. To say that we’re called



to be or do anything assumes that there is a God out there who has a plan, that cares about what's going on in my life, and he has actually purposed for me or called me to be something.

Paul says that, and in our day it sounds foolish. Think about it. If we believe what's on the Discovery Channel, in reality what we sit on, this six-septillion-ton rock that spins around in the cold vacuum of interplanetary space, is nothing more than the debris of an explosion. And we just happen to be here by the product of time plus chance. And there's no real rhyme or reason to this. Everything we see in the created world is simply the result of a cosmic explosion. If you take that as your starting point and start introducing into your vocabulary words like "called by God," it doesn't make any sense.

And Paul says, "Let me tell you how distinctive my thinking is. I think there's a God, and there's a plan for this world. And more specifically, there's a plan for my life." Apostle means sent one. And it's used in two ways in the New Testament: a technical sense, sent one from Christ to establish the church, and in a less technical sense, a general sense, that we are sent, that God has sent us to a particular time and place for a particular purpose. We need to think like Paul, and Paul thought God has a plan.

Jot it down this way in your outline if you're taking notes. We need to think this. We need to think like Paul. God has a plan for me. He has a plan for me. This is not a world that just is by happenchance here. We are not the product of time plus chance. Our world had an architect. It had a builder. It had a planner. And he's put this thing together. And that radically transforms my thinking about the reality of my everyday life.

Turn with me, if you would, to Acts chapter 17, where Paul is addressing the intellectual elite of his day. The university professors are all sitting around waiting for Paul to explain himself as he talks about a religious perspective they had never heard of before. And the apostle Paul says, "Let me tell you about the God of the Bible." And here's how he starts. Drop down in the passage to verse 24. As he uses as a platform a little temple that is a little shrine that is set up to the unknown God, he says, "Let me tell you about the God that you don't know." Acts chapter 17, verse number 24, he says, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth." Stop right there. Look at what we just read. The God who made the world and everything in it is Lord, boss, king, the one in charge of heaven and earth. That's huge. Put that at the top of your Day-Timer and start with that perspective in everyday life.

And then compare it to the world's perspective that is increasingly in our day, starting with the reference point that our life is a cosmic mistake and we're all here by random chance and there's no real rhyme or reason, there's no purpose, there's no architect, there's no planner. This was not a part of anybody's plan. This has just happened. We're just here. And you compare the two lives and perspectives on lives, you compare the perspectives that they will have about themselves, and you'll say they're radically different. They are totally polarized. They are the antithesis of one another. And we've got to say it's not the way it works. In biblical Christianity, we think different.

When the world says, you know what, "I don't know, just making it, doing my thing, whatever, whatever happens, happens, que sera, sera," it's not how it is in Scripture. We believe that God has a plan because God is the maker. Look at the implications as they're laid out by Paul. First he starts with the immediate issues of temples. Well, God's not living in a temple built by hands. He's certainly not



served. They bring him food and whatever they would bring to the altars to serve their gods. You can't serve God. He's not the recipient. He's the giver. Look at the bottom of verse 25. "He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." Do you think your coworkers think that way about their lives? Think about that. He gives us life and breath and everything else.

"From one man," verse 26, "he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth. And he," underline this word, "determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." Let's just stop there for a second. Think about the radical statement there. It is not a mistake, according to biblical thinking, that you are where you are in life, that you live in South Orange County, that you attend Pacific Coast Church, that you have the job that you have, that you're married to the person you're married to, that you have the children that you have, that you've been placed at this particular time in human history. This is all a part of God's plan. According to this passage, because He made the world and has a plan for it, He works out a plan to the details of every single person's life.

The emphasis in Scripture is on the sovereignty of God running the show. The emphasis of today's fallout from the philosophy of time plus chance is really that there is no plan, there is no sovereign God, there is no one in charge of this. And if there is a God, he's certainly not sovereign and in charge of the details of life. And we've got to say there are radically different ways to think. Paul steps on the scene and says, "I know who I am. I know why I'm called. I know that there's a God that's got a plan for me, and I'm just living that out." Now that's a radically different way to think about your life. And it's a way for us to start each morning and say, we've got to think about life that way. We've got to start to focus on the reality that God has not set us here to just kind of do our own thing. We're not deists. He didn't create the world and walk away from it and say, you know, "Figure this out." He's actively and intricately involved.

"In him we live and move and have our being," Paul goes on to say. He sustains all things by the power of his word. He holds everything together, Colossians 1 says. And if God is that involved, then in the morning when I wake up, I don't look in the mirror and say, "Well, we'll see what happens today." We think there's a plan for my life. God knows why I'm here. God has mapped out my life.

On the back of the worksheet every week, I try to give you some reading or some resources, and this week I've given you some reading that's hopefully going to focus your attention on the sovereignty of God, that there is a plan, that God is in charge. If you try and let your mind percolate those truths, if you let the truth of the sovereignty of God start to permeate your thinking, I'm telling you, you will think differently than your coworkers, than your non-Christian family members, than the people in your neighborhood that don't have a sense that there's a rhyme and a reason to this planet.

I mean, I don't know how they can miss it. I mean, think about it. I look around everywhere. I was reading a book on cosmology this week, an astronomer. They talked about eclipses. And it started with, "What an almighty coincidence it is that we can stand on the surface of our planet and look up, and from our perspective the sun and the moon appear to be exactly the same size." And they called it an almighty coincidence. And I think that's amazing. You know that the sun is bigger than the moon, right? And yet from our perspective, every time we have an eclipse, anywhere from five to seven times a year on our planet somewhere, God reminds us that those two disks are exactly the same size from our perspective. The sun is 400 times bigger than the moon, and yet the moon is 400 times closer than



the sun. So from our perspective, guess what? Hey, they match. And you know what? People are sitting around trying to explain that away as a cosmic mistake.

I mean, there's just one. We can talk about DNA. We can talk about microbiology. We can talk about astronomy. What do you want to talk about? To find the order and symmetry and beauty in this world that God has created to remind us, "I got a plan. I'm in charge. This isn't a cosmic mistake. You're not floating around on a six-septillion-ton rock of debris from an explosion." I mean, let's just get it straight. As Christians, we're going to have to think distinctively. And the more we hold to the line that God created the world and has a plan for it, the more distance you will see between us and our secular counterparts. The more distance you'll see between the norm and the street and the typical philosophy of the guy that you work with and how we believe life works, and that we are here because God has designed it and planned it.

I didn't read that last sentence as he goes on in verse 27 and gives you the reason for it. You want the general reason that he sent us here at this time in this place? I know Paul's got a specific sent-one that he's talking about, a sent task, but let's start with the general one. Verse 27, if you're still in Acts 17, it says, "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." This isn't a hard job here. He's everywhere. But you know, the reason is he's put you where he's put you, and he's given you the family he's given you, and he's put you in the time zone he's put you in, is because God says, "I want you to reach out for me. I want you to seek me. I want you to be a part of my—I want you to be intimate. I want you to get to know me." And I'm thinking to myself, man, do we recognize that? That what happens in our lives, these are filled with divine appointments, and this is God at work in my life to try and get me to be more like him, try and get me to know him better.

Let me say this, a little parenthetical excursion for us. For those of you saying, "If God has planned all this out, I'm not liking the plan a whole lot, because my life hurts right now. I just got laid off from my job, my doctor just said I got cancer, and my marriage is on the rocks. If this is all part of God's plan, I don't like God's plan very much." Let me go to a very, very unusual place that you wouldn't think you'd find a lot of comfort. It's in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet for a good reason. Times were bad in Israel. And the weeping prophet is talking about the fact that the sin in Israel is going to lead them to captivity. But I want you to notice something in Jeremiah 29. It's just an amazing statement of God's sovereignty, that even in the midst of the darkness there is the sense in which the people can derive some hope that even when their life is bad, there's a sovereign God on the throne. He has a plan for my life, and I'm just following that out. He has sent me into this trial. He's sent me into this sickness. He's sent me into this unemployment. He sent me into this marital problem. And I can trust him through it, because he knows the beginning from the end. It's not chance. It's not happenstance.

Jeremiah 29. The context is that they've sinned and they're going to go, and the Babylonians are going to take them into captivity. But notice what happens in verse number 10. "This is what Yahweh says: When," underline this, "seventy years are completed for Babylon," the Babylonian captivity, "I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to you and bring you back to this place." Stop right there. Think about that. Before it happens, God tells the prophet, "I just want to let the people know, I know exactly how long this is going to last." Matter of fact, if you do the technical and difficult work of



looking at every reference to the Babylonian captivity in the prophets, in the major and minor prophets, what you will find is it wasn't just the years, it was down to the date. God knew exactly from the time they'd be hauled off in the first deportation to the time they'd have the decree to rebuild the temple, and God had every day planned out.

Now think about that. You get the pink slip from work or whatever, or you get the notice from the lawyer you've got somebody suing you, and you're thinking, oh man, I'm going into a trial. Just know this: God knows the beginning from the end. He knows exactly how long that's going to last. And look at the next statement, just so reassuring for people that are walking through the valley of the shadow of death and hard things are happening. Look, verse 11, he says, "I know the plans I have for you," declares Yahweh, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." I mean, look at that. God says even through this, on the other side, I'm bringing you through this for a reason. And that changes the way it works.

When you come to your coworkers and you tell them, "Look what happened to me. Here's something my doctor said. Look what's going on in my life." And they say, "Oh my goodness, how devastating." And you give them this perspective that "I know God has a plan in all this," they're going to go, "Woohoo, weird." And you know what? That's the distinctiveness of the Christian life. We know that we are called. We are sent ones. We are sent into the place and into the times and even into the trials that God gives us. And he knows the beginning from the end.

He says, "You will seek me," verse 13, "and find me when you seek me with all of your heart." And this, verse 12, "you'll call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You'll seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart. I will be found by you," declares Yahweh, "and I will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I've banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile." Hey, the exile hadn't even happened yet. And he's saying, "Listen, I just want to tell you, I know the end. I know how it's going to end." Man, how reassuring for us. And how the world's going to say, "That's weird. Those Christians are weird." And you know what? That's fine. That's what we're called to be. We're called to be people who know that there is a God that made the world, made my life, put me in this time and place, got a plan for me. I recognize that.

The rub comes in our personal daily lives when we try to kick against God's plan. And I mean, that's when it gets hard. When in reality, I see the plan for my life and I'm thinking, I don't like the plan a whole lot. And Paul knew what that was about. I think perhaps that's one of the reasons, at least, we constantly get the reminder from the apostle Paul's pen that in reality this is always something he's sent toward, and it's always God's will. It's always what God wants. In our passage, it says Paul is, "by the will of God," "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God," by the will of God. Now the will of God is something, you know, those words sound so right in the text of Scripture because they're just so disjointed from daily, you know, talk. But in reality, the word will simply means desire, the preference, the want. By the want of God, by the preference of God, by God's desire. This is what he wants.

And the text is really clear throughout the Scripture that when the apostle Paul, or anybody else who wants to live godly, they've got to have this sense of deference to God's wants and not their own.



Perhaps best summed up by Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane, when he was facing something that didn't really match his wants, he said, "You know what, though? Not my will, but yours be done."

Number two on your outline, I think this is important. We need to think like the apostle Paul. And the apostle Paul had this as the bottom-line foundation of his life. Here's how I put it. Think this way: his will, not mine. When it gets down to it, it's his will, not mine.

Now compare that to the thinking of our world today. Is that the way your coworkers think? They're deferring to some invisible God in heaven that they've never even seen with their own eyes, and they're going to say, "You know what, I want what he wants, not what I want"? No, no, no, no. It's all about what I want. And yet the Scripture says, no, it's his will, not mine. And the apostle Paul said, "I am called to be a sent one of God, not by my own will." As a matter of fact, Paul knew what it was to kick against the will of God.

Turn with me to another passage in the book of Acts, if you would—Acts chapter 26—where Paul gives his testimony to King Agrippa before he gets shipped off to Rome, and he's telling him why he's under arrest, and he talks about the hope that he has in Christ, and he gives his testimony about how he came to be a sent one. Look at what he says in Acts chapter 26. Acts chapter 26—he's talking about how he was actually persecuting the church before he joined them, how he was actually opposed to this thing. And in verse number 12, he's telling Agrippa that on one of these journeys (Acts 26:12), he said, "I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. And at about noon, O king, I was on the road and I saw a light from heaven. It was brighter than the sun and it was blazing around me and my companions. We fell to the ground. I heard a voice to me saying in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul,'" that was his old name, right? "'Why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'"

Now, you probably haven't used the vocabulary word goads this week in your daily discussions. A reminder of that is in this agrarian society, you had these mules or camels or donkeys or whatever, and if you needed to poke and push and prod them to go the right way, you used something called a goad. And the animals, if they were dumb, they might fight that. They might kick against it. But the goad—whether it was a stick or, in later years, an iron rod—they would poke these animals to get them to go in the right direction.

It's kind of the equivalent of the Old Testament staff of the shepherd, right? The idea that the shepherd has a staff, and if he needs to, he pokes and prods and pushes the lamb to go in the right direction. And look what he says. He says, "Hard, isn't it, Paul, to kick against the goads? I mean, isn't that hard for you? Keep fighting me on this."

And so he slams him to the ground. He wrestles him to the mat. In verse 15, Saul-Paul asks, "Well, who are you?" He says, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied. "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to"—here's a good phrase to underscore—"appoint you. I'm going to appoint you. I got a plan for you, and I'm going to make you do it. Now go, as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles."



Here's another phrase where we get the word apostle from: "I am sending you. I am sending you to them." To do what? "To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and have a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." And then he steps out of his testimony. He says, "So then, King Agrippa, I did not prove to be disobedient to the vision from heaven." He says, "I was not disobedient to it." Oh, I fought it for a long time, but when God really got my attention in the crisis or whatever, I said, "Your will, not mine." I know what it was to kick against God's will for my life.

How about you? Do you know what it's like to kick against God's will for your life? And all I'm telling you is the mantra, the philosophy, the theology—the foundation of my life—needs to be every time I see that crossroads and it's tough, man, I want to say, "Not my will, but yours be done." We need to work on that. It needs to be a part of our life. It needs to be a part of our thinking. Now, some of us are saying, but you're using a phrase from the Garden of Gethsemane. Man, that was a tough time in the Garden of Gethsemane. I mean, think about it. Jesus was there facing the cross. You know, if that's what the Christian life's all about—

Let me just remind you of this. And a good passage to jot down might be Psalm 37:4. Because in Psalm 37:4, it's a verse most of us learned as little kids: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

Now think about that. There's a boat in the harbor. What are you talking about? Vacation home on Kauai. You know, what are you getting at here? And the Scripture's really clear that in time, as we delight ourselves in God, he either changes our desires, gives us and implants desires in our life. The bottom line is most of the time, as we walk with God and delight in him, you know what? My desires become his. Or as I think it is, Psalm 40 says, "I delight to do your will, O God." That becomes the norm.

Oh, there are the exceptions. There are those hard times. There are those crisis moments where we're kicking against the goads of God's will. But I'm saying the great thing about the Christian life is, generally speaking, because we love him, because we delight in him, because we get to know him, we delight to do what he wants.

It's like a good marriage. It's like a good relationship. The more we love that person, if they say, "Here's what I'd like to do tonight, here's where we'd like to go today, here's the things"—you know—man, that'd be great. It's fulfilling. It's gratifying. Our desires get intertwined. And if that's what you want, that's what I want because I love you.

We've got to say to God constantly, not my will but yours. And that may sound like a drudgery, but like Scripture says—like John said in 1 John—his commands become my delight. They're not burdensome. I find, as Psalm 119 says, "I delight in your law. I delight in your precepts." You've got to think his will, not mine. I'm telling you, that's not the way the world thinks.

Probably best summarizing our day's hubris and excessive pride and self-centeredness is William Ernest Henley's poem *Invictus*. I remember reading it a long time ago in college, and the whole thing just summarizes the philosophy of the world, and it crescendos into the stubborn stance of so many



today. Notice the themes we've already talked about in his poem. And he meant to say this is a positive statement:

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul."

And I think, man, that is more and more characterizing the lives of people today. And here we are as Christians saying, you want to be God, you want to be Christlike—what we're doing is constantly deferring to the will of God. It is, as Psalm 100, verse number 3 says, "Yahweh made us. He is our God. We are the sheep of his pasture." He's the shepherd. We let him call the shots. Christ is not our co-pilot, but he is in charge. He drives this bus. We're along for the ride. We defer to his will.

I thought of Henley's poem when I heard Timothy McVeigh interviewed before he was executed for the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building. And as the interviewer was talking—what do you think about heaven and hell? What do you think about the afterlife? I mean, what do you think is going to happen? You know, all this. And he said, "Well, I don't believe in all that." He said, "But if there is a heaven or hell, here's what I think. I will adapt, I will improvise, and I will overcome."

And I said, there is the excessive arrogance of our generation, who thinks because we say it, we can immediately be the god of our own universe. And God says, "No, no, no. I made you. I'm God. I call the shots." And for Christians, we realize that. We affirm that. We confess that. And we defer to that. And we wait to hear his call in our lives. We say he's our shepherd. He feeds us. And even if he leads us through the valley of the shadow of death, we'll follow our shepherd. And you're not going to find that philosophy in our world very often. The distinctiveness of that thinking will transform our lives, and it certainly won't conform with this world.

Paul said, "I'm called to be a sent one of Christ Jesus. I'm called by the want, the desire, the will of God." And that's a wonderful statement, and he says things like this so often. And then he adds a word



in the bottom of verse 1 that is unique to his introduction, though the concept is not. He introduces us to a guy named Sosthenes. Now, we heard his name over there in the book of Acts. We're not even sure if it's the same guy, but nevertheless, he introduces us to a guy that he verbally puts his arm around, and he says, "I'm just telling you, I'm here with Sosthenes."

Now, if there's ever a guy that didn't need Sosthenes, I would think it would be Paul. You can write a letter, tell us, you know, your take on this. You're inspired of God. Write us this letter. And yet every time he seems to write a letter of the New Testament—not always, but frequently—we'll see him constantly putting his verbal hand around somebody's shoulder and saying, "You know, I'm just telling you, I'm here with some other folks." Silas, Timothy, Epaphras. I mean, here is Sosthenes. "I just want to tell you, I'm going to write you Corinthians, but I just want to let you know I'm here with our brother Sosthenes." And I learned something about the apostle Paul in that simple admission at the beginning of his letters that I think runs so counter to our culture today. He saw himself not as a soloist. He saw himself as a team player.

Number three on your outline, if you're taking notes, that's the way we need to think. Number three: I'm a part of a team. We need to think that. I'm part of a team. I'm not a soloist. The world constantly wants us to think that we're on our own. We're independent, good Americans. We do it by ourselves. We don't need help. We don't need to submit our plans to other people. We don't need their counsel. We just plow. We do it. We let the chips fall.

But in the Scripture, it's always calling us to a community attitude—that we are together on this, that we are community, that we are brothers, that we put our arm around others when we're facing trials or issues or whatever. And we don't just go off into our corner and sit on a rock and wait for God to show us the way. We see the wisdom of God as we counsel and advise, collaborate, and consult with others in the body of Christ.

Paul says, "Yeah, I'm going to write you guys some things. I just want to let you know I'm here with Sosthenes." Well, God's inspiring the book, I realize that, but from a human perspective, he's saying, "I just want to let you know Sosthenes and I agree on this. We've collaborated on this. We agree on this. We think this is right." And then he goes off and writes his letter.

Is that the way people view you—as a team player? Or do they watch you go off by yourself, make decisions about your life, your job, your finances, and you just kind of go off and you do that by yourself? You come out of your closet, you announce it to people. And I'm not just talking about husbands and wives discussing. I'm talking about husbands and wives sitting with other husbands and wives and other godly people and discussing the plans for their life.

Proverbs is excellent, and it's ingenious in the way it paints this picture for us. Turn with me to the Proverbs, and let's just look at a few of them. Proverbs 28 describes the foolishness of the kind of American spirit that seems so prevalent. A few weeks back, I suggested you get a secular book called *Bowling Alone* by a Harvard professor that tracks for us the problems in American culture—how we become more independent, we become more disenfranchised from one another, and that we just reduce our circle of consultation to one or two people, usually in our immediate family. And sometimes people



don't even go that far. And I'm just telling you, our culture is going the other direction, and we as Christians need to be going in a distinctive direction toward more and more community.

Look at Proverbs chapter 28. Drop down to verse number 26. Look what it says: "He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe." Now wisdom—you think, okay, well, that's found in God, that's found in his word—and you're right about that. But one thing that's been interwoven throughout all of the Proverbs is it's just not found in isolation. It's not just found in personal Bible study. It's not just found in personal prayer time.

Turn back to chapter 13. Here's one example of several. How about chapter 13, verse number 20? "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." And even dumber might be just to trust in my own wisdom and go off in my own private world and make my own decisions. But you walk with the wise—you'll grow wise. Look across the page, chapter 15. Look at verse 22. You want to get practical? This is what it gets down to: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."

Want to fail? Here's the surefire way to do it, Scripture says: go off on your own, trust in your own thinking, your own intellect, and sort these things out on your own wisdom. Success? You want to do it God's way—collaboration, community, more people involved. And let's just think about it. How about you? Are you that kind of person? And there are so many—they announce it to me in the lobby: "Well, I've decided we're moving to Nebraska." Or, "I've decided I'm going to start this new business." Or, "I've decided we're going to do this new thing." And I say, "Well, who have you talked to about this? Have you consulted with some godly people, some Christians? Have you talked about it?"

"Well, no, but we've just decided this. We know it's God's will." How do you know? "Well, you know, we've been praying about it." And all I'm saying is that's taking one resource of Scripture and utilizing it without the advantage of all the other things that God has called us to. And one of those things is community. One of those things is thinking I'm part of a team. I'm not a soloist. I don't make all these decisions on my own.

You know, I know if Jesse Ventura says, you know, religion is just a crutch for the weak-minded, right? And they all gather together because they all need the help of each other—just a bunch of weak-minded people. Great. Fantastic. If that's what they want to think, they'll call us weird. But in reality, what we recognize is that God manifests his wisdom and his direction and his will in our lives and for our lives as we get our arm around people like Sosthenes—and in our church, Jim and Pam and whoever—and we say, "Man, let's talk about what's going on. Help me through this. Let's think through this together."

Chapter 20, verse 18—we could spend all day in Proverbs looking these up. Proverbs 20:18: "Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance." Now that's what Paul was doing. He's making plans. He's going to wage, if you will, a doctrinal war. He's going to lay down the issues in Corinthians. And what he's doing, he's putting his arm around Sosthenes, and he's just saying, "I want to let you know, Sosthenes and I—we're in on this together." Man, he's doing that. How about you? Making plans? Are you seeking advice? This is so important.



And again, the world's going to say, no, that's not how it works. You know, the world, unfortunately, has not had the advantage of having the redeemed perspective of a mind that's been invaded by the Holy Spirit. Because in reality, we are born, aren't we? Just look at your kids. We are born selfish, independent—"I can do it myself." All of that is just pervasive in the human spirit. And God is saying, listen, you need to stop focusing on independence and start focusing on interdependence. And those become nasty and bad words in our culture, right? You don't want to be dependent on people. You need to be independent.

The Bible calls the body of Christ to be interdependent. We need to value congregation and congregating and not going off into our own corners. And all I'm just telling you is this is an aspect that will make us distinctive from the rest of the world. We will be seen as different. The more we take these three thoughts that really underline Paul's thinking of himself—God has a plan for me, it's his will not mine, and I'm a part of a team—look at those three statements. If they pervade your thinking, you will be considered in the minds of people strange.

I hate to use two Twilight Zone illustrations in one sermon. But since I got to thinking about the Twilight Zone, I thought about that one episode where that gal's head was all wrapped up. It was an old black and white. They're in that hospital. Plastic surgeons are there. They're going to fix her because she's got the ugly disease really bad. Apparently you never get to see her face, but she's really messed up. Did you watch this? They've got her all wrapped up and you can't see her, and there's dark shadows and everything. And the doctor, you know, "We're going to have to send her off to the ugly colony if we can't fix her this time. She's really bad."

And, you know, it's just, "I don't know what we're going to do. And we're going to give her one more shot. We'll, you know, work on her face. We'll try and get her looking better. We'll do the best we can. And let's see how this is." So 22 minutes later, near the end of the episode—finally, the moment of truth—the gauze coming off. You see the back of her, as I recall, maybe the back corner. And finally the camera comes around to the front. And you see her face. You're waiting. You're thinking, what's Rod got up his sleeve this time? And then you see her face—and she's stunning, beautiful, blonde, perfect face. You're like, wow. And the camera pans up to the doctor and the nurse, and they're all consoling each other. "Sorry, doctor, it didn't work out." "Sorry, it's so bad." "Oh, we hoped we'd fix her this time."

And then Rod Serling comes on in the dark shadows in the corner. "Now the question comes to mind: where is this world?" I got the script right here. He says, "And when is it? What kind of world where ugliness is the norm and beauty is the deviation?" And he goes on with his, you know, little philosophizing. But the bottom line is he says, "You know what? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

And I think to myself, you know what? It's really not as subjective as that when it comes to biblical beauty. Because when we get down to it, biblical beauty is reflecting the glory of Christ. And in the Bible, it says that as we grow in Christ and become increasingly sanctified and set apart, and as our thinking transforms our behavior, we become more and more like him. And as we become more and more like him, in God's eyes, we become more beautiful and more beautiful and more beautiful.



But the world is sitting around trying to squeeze us into its mold. The world's going to look at us and say, "We can fix these guys. You know what? They're messed up. We can fix them. We need to take them out to lunch because they don't get it," you know. And they're constantly trying to change us. But beauty is reflecting the behavior and the thinking of Christ. And though our world will stare at us and we'll be the object of scorn, and though people will think we're weird, we need to become comfortable with our distinctiveness. We need to become proud of our distinctiveness.

And not weirdness for the sake of weirdness, but being able to say, I am ready to be called distinctive and different because I follow and reflect the beauty of Christ. One day the world's going to find out, and every knee shall bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And one day beauty will be well defined. And all those folks that were trying to pour us into their mold will be able to say, "You know what? That really was what it was all about after all." In our mixed-up world, we will be vindicated.

Let's pray.

God, help us in a world that prides itself on tolerance. And yet, in reality, every year we seem to find that the world and society is increasingly more hostile toward Christianity. And that to stand up and say, "We're going to follow the Bible, we're going to do what Scripture says, we're going to believe that there is a God who's created this world—he has a plan for me, I defer to his will, I don't just rely on my own judgment, I sit there with my arm around other Christians and we move into the future as a community, not as individuals"—and people will say, "I don't get that. I don't understand it." They'll be hostile toward those thoughts.

Help us, God, to stand firm. And if people stare, and if socially we seem so strange and bizarre to them, God, let us look forward to one day when we'll see Christ face to face. And all the people, as 2 Corinthians 4 says, who've been blinded and can't see the glory, the beauty of Christ, will one day bow before him.

Help us, Lord, to look forward to that day and do our best to convince people what true beauty and what true wisdom and what it is to live life the right way. But God, if they don't see that, we'll wait for the day of vindication.

God, we know we seem different to the world. Help us not only to be comfortable, but to let our light so shine before men that they can see our good works. And it starts with our thinking. Transform us, God, by the renewing of our mind to think like the apostle Paul.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.