

**LIVING THE RELATIONSHIPS CHRIST CAME TO REDEEM  
(5) JESUS: HOW TO BECOME EXTRAORDINARILY NORMAL**

John 1:9-17

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(Loosely inspired by John Ortberg's book, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, Zondervan)

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**PROLOGUE**

Relationships can be problematic even at the best of times but they seem to be especially strained during the holidays. The good news is that with God's help we can overcome the problems that drive us apart and learn how to come together in the life-changing relationships God designed us for. This is the theme of John Ortberg's popular book called, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*.

**SCRIPTURE**

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. {10} He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. {11} He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. {12} But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, {13} who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. {14} And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. {15} (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") {16} From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. {17} The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:9-17 NRSV).

**MESSAGE**

On Monday, many of you will return to the same stores you frantically visited in recent days. In some cases it will be to return gifts. But in other cases it will be to look for bargains. In certain stores you will find a section of merchandise available at greatly reduced prices. The tip-off is a particular tag you will see on all the items in that area. Each tag carries the same words: *as is*. This is a euphemistic way of saying, "These are damaged goods." Sometimes they're called slightly irregular. The store is issuing you fair warning: "This is the department of Something's-Gone-Wrong. You're going to find a flaw here: a stain that won't come out; a zipper that won't zip; a button that won't butt – there will be a problem. These items are not normal."

John Ortberg, in his popular book, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, makes this comparison:

When you deal with human beings, you have come to the "as is" corner of the universe. Think for a moment about someone in your life. Maybe the person you know best, love most. That person is slightly irregular. That person comes with a little tag: There's a flaw here. . . [So] if you want to enter into a relationship with this model, there is only one way. "As is."

When we enter relationships with the illusion that people are normal, we resist the truth that they are not. We enter into an endless attempt to fix them, control them, or pretend that they are what they are not. This is why so many of our relationships are not healthy.

The truth is we respond to life in our fallen world in unhealthy and selfish ways. We pretend to be kinder and healthier and more spiritual than we really are. We think of ourselves as normal and assume others should be as well. Ortberg comments:

We are tempted to live under the illusion that somewhere out there are people who are normal. In the movie *As Good As It Gets*, Helen Hunt is wracked by ambivalence toward Jack Nicholson. He is kind and generous to her and her sick son, but he is also agoraphobic, obsessive-compulsive, and terminally offensive: If rudeness were measured in square miles, he'd be Texas. In desperation, Helen finally cries to her mother: "I just want a normal boyfriend." "Oh," her mother responds in empathy, "everybody wants one of those. There's no such thing, dear."

Which leads me back to the Christmas story. It is imperative that we understand Jesus was not born into a normal world. The world Jesus entered needs to be labeled: *as is*. The world is flawed, irregular, not working properly, and belongs in the department of Something's-Gone-Wrong. Ortberg says:

We all want to look normal, to think of ourselves as normal, but the writers of Scripture insist that no one is "totally normal" – at least not as God defines normal. "All we like sheep have gone astray," they tell us. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

You see, Jesus did not come to encourage us to be a bit braver or to try a bit harder. He was not born in Bethlehem just so God could cheer on ordinary people as they live out their normal lives. If he had come for normal people, it would have been a wasted visit. None of us is normal. Rather, Jesus came to claim flawed lives and make them extraordinarily normal.

As a kid, I knew a man who lived just outside of my hometown of Wisconsin Dells. I will refer to him as "Oxford Tom" although that was not his real name. Oxford Tom excelled at fixing things. That is how I met him. My bike was not working. We tried a couple of other

places but not until Oxford Tom got a hold of it did it become fully functional.

Oxford Tom would often buy damaged products from a store or pick up items at the junk yard, take them home, and work on them until they were as good as new. No longer damaged, no longer flawed – they were back to normal and quite valuable.

The Christmas story means many things to many people. But at the core, the idea is simple. Jesus is our Oxford Tom. He has come to claim us, flawed as we are, and make us into something as good as new. This will not happen in one day or even one lifetime. But it can start anytime – tonight if you wish. As the Scripture says:

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God (1:12)

As the children of God we will never be completely normal in this life, but we know that a new world is coming, one in which we will no longer be in the “as is” department of the universe. With a nod to C. S. Lewis and his *Chronicles of Narnia*, John Ortberg sums it up this way:

Then, for the first time since Eden, everyone will be the person God intended them to be. Then we will discover that what we call the end of our lives is not the end at all; it is only the beginning of Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before. And we will all be normal at last.