

# REDEFINING NORMAL

**Life Group Materials**

Adapted from the book  
Redefining Normal by  
Dave Rhodes

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## **The Heartbeat of Redefining Normal**

For many of us, normal Christianity is comfortable and secure, isolated, and based on all the evils we don't do. But what if our norm isn't normal to God? What if God isn't satisfied for us to settle for normal in our lives? Our world needs Christians to be more than disciplined, more than moral, and more than honest. Our world needs Christians to be blessings. If you have the courage to redefine normal, or if you want to have the courage, come on this journey with us. We don't claim to have all the answers, because we are on this journey as well. But from just a few steps ahead, we can tell you it is the adventure of a lifetime.

Today we want to begin our journey of Redefining Normal by looking at some words from Isaiah 61. These words are important because they later became the words by which Jesus defined His life in Luke 4. So listen to these words and their stories to see if they begin to redefine normal in us.

## **BACKGROUND**

The book of Isaiah is normally divided into two sections. Chapters 1-39 address God's people before the exile. In these chapters, Isaiah cries out against the people's sin and urges them to repent. The main message is that judgment is coming. And judgment does come. God's people are defeated by a foreign army and taken to a foreign land. But starting in chapter 40, the book of Isaiah takes a remarkably different tone. In fact, the change of tone is so radical that some scholars believe someone else wrote the second part. Addressed to the people in the midst of exile (which is another reason some scholars have trouble believing Isaiah wrote it), this portion of the book talks of restoration and hope. It lets the people of God in on the heart of God and reminds them that His heart has not given up on them.

***Read Isaiah 61:1-3***

## **EXPLANATION**

Isaiah 61 encourages the people of God by telling them that God is in the midst of changing things. He is not a God disconnected from the struggles of His people; He is a God who is close, personally working out His will. They may seem like broken twigs today, but it will not be long until they are transformed into oaks of righteousness.

***Read Luke 4:14-21***

Discussion Questions

- 1. What struck you about these passages of Scripture as we read them?**
- 2. How would you describe Jesus' actions and words here?**
- 3. Why do you think Luke chose these words of Jesus to define His life and work and ministry?**
- 4. How do these words define Jesus' life and work and ministry?**

It is interesting that Jesus picked up on this passage in Isaiah to define His coming-out party. It's not what we would expect. The crowd must have hushed as Jesus unrolled the scroll and read these words from Isaiah. Then what Jesus did next must have truly astonished them. He sat down, as rabbis would do when they taught, and made one statement, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." What Jesus was saying is that He is the embodiment of all that we have been hoping for. He is jubilee. He is restoration. He is release. In short, Jesus was saying that things are about to change. Normal is about to be redefined. And God's heart is about to be revealed through His life.

The shocking thing for us today, though, is not that Jesus is a living representation of the heart of God. Rather, the shocking thing is what His heart values. See, a lot of us believe (it's sometimes a hidden belief) that God's heart is one of judgment. We are pretty sure that what God wants most is to punish us. Because of this, being Christian for us then becomes about a long list of things that we don't do. It's a life of *no*. "No, I don't do that – I'm a Christian. No, I would never go there – I'm a Christian. No, I won't wear that, drink that, smoke that, wear my hair like that." The list goes on and on.

But the question today is this: Is the life of *no* what Jesus' life was all about? Is the movement of *no* the movement He came to start? And is the gospel of *no* the gospel He came to die for? If it is, then maybe Jesus should have found another passage for His life verse.

But maybe there is another option. Maybe the gospel and movement and life of Jesus are not about all the things people are not supposed to do. Even though the religion of Jesus' day often focused on things and people and places to avoid — because in that day as in ours, people were trying to avoid God's judgment — Jesus wanted His life to embody something better. Maybe Jesus' life was the life of *yes*. Of course there were things Jesus said *no* to (though His list was definitely shorter than some of ours). But perhaps He said *no* to those things so that He could say *yes* to something far greater with his life. And maybe it's the *yes* stuff that Jesus and His movement and His gospel and His life were and are really all about. To use Jesus' words, maybe being Christian is about walking and seeing and recovering and releasing and proclaiming.

If this is so, then we need a radical overhaul of what it really means to be a follower of Christ. If this is so, we need to rethink what God wants from our lives and for our world. If this is so, then maybe just maybe, what we call normal needs to be redefined. Let us do this so that we can wake up to life as God intends it.

Main Point: where we see today's point and match it to what's happening in their lives

#### Discussion Questions

1. Which word do you think describes normal Christianity today, *yes* or *no*? How do you see both of these words in Christianity?
2. Have you personally ever been tempted to think of Christianity as what you say *no* to more than what you say *yes* to?
3. As Christians we are called to live out our purpose instead of just try to avoid doing bad things How would the life of *purpose* change the way you think about God? How would it change the way you think about yourself? How would it change the way you think about your world?

## APPLICATION

So here is today's big idea: **normal isn't normal**. Normal needs to change. The status quo needs to be challenged. And the place where normal needs to be redefined first is in our lives. A lot of times, we look around our world and believe our world needs to change. But if we are not careful, we could easily spend our lives trying to change the world with a half-gospel, believing that if we can just manage everyone's behavior, outlaw the things that need to be outlawed, legislate our view of morality, and expect the whole unchristian world to act like they are half-gospel Christians, then everything will be right and good. But maybe the problem with our world is first a problem with us. Maybe we need to get back to walking and seeing and recovering and releasing and proclaiming.

For that to happen, two major shifts need to happen in our lives. First, we need to realize that what we have been saved *for* is more important than what we have been saved *from*. Being a Christian is not just about being saved from sin. Yes, God is opposed to sin. Yes, without God we are sinners and stand in opposition to His desires and will. Yes, our sin is a big deal. And yes, Jesus died on the cross for that sin.

But Christ's death and resurrection are about more than sin cancelation. His death is also about life. It is about life as God has always intended it. It is about bringing this life in dead places. It is about the kind of life that looks like freedom and faith and hope and love.

This leads us to the second shift, one that deals with how we see the world. In the half-gospel, the world is something to avoid. In the half-gospel, the world is only a broken and bad place that seeks to break us down and destroy our faith. And in the life of no, our biggest battle is against the world. But as we launch from the life of Jesus, we begin to see the world through a different lens.

# Normal isn't normal

Picture: Seasons of trees

Every year in September or October, the weather begins to change. Cooler air moves in from the north, and autumn (or fall) takes over the world. As fall begins to make its mark, the leaves on the trees turn bright orange and red and yellow before they fall to the ground, leaving the trees barren. Throughout the winter the trees lay seemingly dormant, looking almost dead. But then spring comes and brings rebirth with new, green leaves. In spring we see not the stripping away of excess baggage but the renewal of what life is supposed to look like.

Connecting the picture: The seasons give us a dramatic picture of following Christ. The trees shed their leaves in the fall to weather the winter. If the leaves were still there, the snow and ice of winter would be too heavy for the trees and would cause them to lose limbs or even crack down the middle. Likewise, we must strip things away in our lives. The problem comes, however, when we define following God like a tree in the winter — stripped, barren and lifeless. But today we are discovering that following God is more like a tree in the spring, emerging with new life and full of fruit, fulfilling the purpose for which it was made. Isaiah defines this goal as becoming oaks of righteousness.

We discover today that God is redeeming the world, that He is not against the world. Being separate *for* the world means that we see the world in a different way. No longer can we simply define the world as the enemy that we must fight at all costs. God is not against the world. Rather, the world is

the object of God's — and our — redeeming love. When we redefine normal, we become agents of restoration and blessing to the world.