

# REDEFINING NORMAL

**Life Group Materials**

Adapted from the book  
Redefining Normal by  
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## **Redefining Normal • Week 2 • April 18, 2021**

### **Ice Breaker:**

1. What is the most powerful land animal you have seen in real life?
2. What is the most exotic reptile you have seen in real life?
3. What is the most dangerous aquatic creature you have seen in real life?

Most of us come into contact with powerful, dangerous, and exotic creatures only in controlled environments. Normal is looking through glass or a cage at the zoo or the aquarium. But normal can be really disappointing sometimes. Imagine going to see the lions only to discover all they do is just lie there and sleep. Where's the power in that? Or imagine going to see the deadly sharks, and all they do is swim mindlessly back and forth in a tank. Where's the danger in that? Or imagine walking past a 20-foot-long snake that doesn't even move and makes you wonder if it is even real. This must be why they put up signs that say, "Don't hit the glass," or "Please don't feed the lions." We want to see these animals move, because if they don't move, how could we know if they are even really alive?

### **Connecting the illustration:**

We should also ask this question about our faith — if it doesn't move, how do we know it is alive? In normal Christianity, people know how to put their faith on display at church, but I imagine that looks pretty boring to people who are looking in from the outside. All these Christians who claim to have access to the same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead seem to be just lying around. They're barely allowing their faith to move them at all.

Many churches define faith as walking down an aisle or confirming a religious decision in front of an audience. While these steps can be very helpful starts to a life of Christian faith, they are far from the full picture. Ephesians 2:8 says that we are saved by grace through faith. When a person calls on the name of the Lord and is saved, he begins a faith journey.

But it doesn't stop there. God wants more from us than just a faith decision. He wants us to redefine normal and become people who live by faith, people who are moved by their faith. Jesus is not just looking for believers; He is calling for followers. So we are going to release our faith back into the wild where it is free to move and live and thrive once again. We have allowed ourselves to be caged up for far too long. Let's look and see how we can fling open the gates and redefine normal faith.

### **BACKGROUND**

The point where you examine Scripture and share your vantage points on it

Luke places this event in the midst of a series of incidents and parables designed to describe the character of a disciple. Our tendency to reduce faith to an isolated decision echoes the Jewish people's tendency to make their national identity and observance of the law the sole expression of their faith.

Also, in Jesus' day, wealth for religious people was often seen as a reward for good behavior. If someone was healthy and wealthy, then God was definitely blessing them, according to the normal belief of the day. This helps underscore how drastically Jesus was redefining normal by asking this man to give up the outward appearance of religion for the inward reality of His Kingdom.

***Read Luke 18:18-27***

Discussion Questions

- 1. What was the official's picture of faith before he met Jesus?**
- 2. How did Jesus challenge this official's picture of faith? Why do you think Jesus did this?**
- 3. What would you say the difference is between believing and following?**

### **EXPLANATION**

Any conversation with Jesus is layered with meaning, so it's no surprise that there is a lot going on in this passage. The local official who came to Jesus was probably a religious leader in his community. His conversation with Jesus reveals that he was a pretty devout religious person. He believed in God, followed all the right rules, and had obviously made a decision from a young age never to cross certain moral lines.

But Jesus cut to the chase and challenged this man to get out of his cage. According to normal religion, this official had done everything right, but Jesus wanted to redefine normal faith for him. Jesus asked him to give up the one thing he clung to most — his wealth — and follow Him. It's good that the local official had said no to a lot of major temptations, but it was time for him to start saying yes to a new way of life and a new kind of faith. Jesus wanted this man to enlarge his faith from mere belief to truly following, from standing back to stepping forward. Jesus was looking for a faith that moved.

This passage is not just about money — it is about anything in our normal Christian lives that holds us back from the abundant and eternal life to which God is calling us.

### **The point**

What's the difference between a mountain and a volcano? Most people will say lava. Lava is molten rock, but you might not know that, as long as that molten rock stays below the surface, it's called magma. What is inside the mountain is very important, but no one will ever know that the mountain is really a volcano unless that magma cracks through the surface and starts flowing. Lava is flowing magma.

Connecting the picture: So which picture best describes you spiritually? Are you a mountain? In other words, are you someone who has never decided to accept Jesus? Are you cold, hard, and dead on the inside?

Are you a dormant volcano? In other words, are you someone who decided a long time ago to accept Jesus, who has been forgiven, who has had your core melted and transformed by the Holy Spirit, but who is now content not to let any of your core beliefs crack through the surface? If so, from the outside no one would ever know that you aren't just another mountain.

Or are you an active volcano? In other words, are you living a life that cascades forth with faith, hope, and love because your relationship with Jesus flows out into every area of your life?

Belief is content to stay underneath the surface, but faith...**faith moves.**

## **APPLICATION**

In recent generations, the church has been obsessed with people making a decision to believe Christ or taking part in a ceremony to confirm that decision. Let's be crystal clear here: Those things are vital. Making a decision is extremely important. Saying yes to Jesus and calling on His name is the most important decision someone can ever make.

But let's not overlook the fact that the Bible says more about making repeated decisions than making one decision. Jesus constantly asked people to follow Him no matter where He might go. Sadly, too many of us are dormant volcanoes – people who made a decision at some point but hardly ever force their faith to the surface and let it flow into every area of their life.

The perception of normal Christianity is one in which we stand around and say what we believe and talk about the fact that we are going to heaven and how everybody else can go to hell because we have said yes to Jesus and they haven't. We stand in a crowd of spectators who admire and cheer for the person of Jesus but who are unwilling to move with Him out into the unknown. This kind of faith is no longer acceptable. It's time for us to redefine normal faith. This means going beyond just saying and singing what we believe to deciding to walk by faith because **faith moves.**

### Discussion Questions

- 1. The local official was reluctant to give up his wealth. What are some areas in your life with which you struggle to trust God?**
- 2. Where are some places in your life where your faith is moving and active? How did you get to that kind of faith?**

Redefining normal is about a faith that moves. It is about not only one decision but all of our decisions, today and everyday. Redefining normal is about putting our whole lives in God's hands — our relationships, our future, our security, and our identity — and moving wherever and whenever Jesus wants us to move. It's OK to be nervous or to have questions when you move and follow God into the unknown. God doesn't want you to have a plastic faith with artificial flavoring and coloring, faith devoid of any human emotion. Instead, God is calling us to the kind of faith that sizzles with anticipation, crackles with a desire to move, and drips with excitement at the endless possibilities that a life lived fully devoted to Christ can hold.

## Digging Deep

In today's lesson, we see that **faith moves**. Now we want to dig a little deeper into the lives of three Biblical characters to learn more about how they moved with faith.

**Abraham:** Genesis 12:1-4

**Noah:** Genesis 6:9-22

**The Israelites:** Exodus 14:1-31

### Discussion Questions

1. **What did this person believe about God?**
2. **How did their faith move them to act on that belief?**
3. **How did this character face uncertainty?**
4. **How did God come through?**
5. **How can we walk by faith as this character did?**

**ABRAHAM:** God called Abraham to pack up his possessions and take his family to a place. God established a covenant with Abraham and said that He wanted to bless him and establish a chosen people through his family. Abraham believed God truly was speaking to him and that what he heard was true. But he didn't just believe; he also moved.

There was one problem, though: God did not tell Abraham where to go. Think about that. God called Abraham to go to a place but didn't say where. The crazy thing is that Abraham obeyed. Imagine what kind of faith he had. Abraham heard God speak, and he packed up his entire family and set out to pursue God. His faith moved.

**NOAH:** Strange things happened in this story too. Imagine being Noah and having God come up to you: "Hey, Noah. What's up? Listen, I want you to build a boat. There's going to be a flood." Remember that, at this point in human history, there had never been rain. It seemed like God was telling Noah to do something absolutely ridiculous.

What went through Noah's mind? He must have been asking, "Why in the world does he want me to build a boat? Where's the water going to come from?" It's amazing that Noah did what God said, but it turned out to be a pretty smart move. We know the end of the story. The rains came, and Noah and his family were safe in the boat, along with a zoo's worth of animals. Noah walked the plank; he built the boat. His faith moved.

**THE ISRAELITES:** God's people were in bondage in Egypt, and they cried out to Him. He heard their cries and sent Moses to deliver them. God worked miracles to get Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery, but they left on a route near the Red Sea, and when Pharaoh changed his mind, they were trapped. But God parted the Red Sea, and the Israelites crossed by faith. Notice how their faith moved. They did not just say, "I believe God can keep us safe through this sea." They put their money (and their feet) where their mouth was. Their belief in God caused them to move.

One of the biggest questions that believers wrestle with is, "What is God's will for my life?" We all want to know what that is.

It would be awesome if you went to your mailbox or checked your e-mail or found a message in a bottle the day after you were saved and found a detailed, 39-page timeline that described the rest of your life. You would be so excited to find out the answer to every question you had about your life — what your job would be, whom you'd marry, where you'd go to school, how many kids you'd have and where you'd live. Everything you needed to know would be nicely and neatly presented in one document. It would be a great message to get.

This is what we often want. We crave a nice package in which God explains everything to us. But the truth is that God doesn't work that way. If He did, we wouldn't need faith. God calls us to step into the unknown so that we can find Him standing right there. He wants us to come to Him in faith. He wants our belief in Him to move us into the unknown. He wants us to act so that we can learn to trust Him more and more.

#### Discussion Questions

- 1. How is God calling you to move?**
- 2. What should you do about the uncertainties before you?**
- 3. What is one way you can actively live out your faith as you leave the lesson today? Is it a question you need to seek an answer to? Is it a change you need to make? Is it a person you need to serve? Is it a major life decision? Is it something else?**