

The Normal Christian Life  
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(PIC) This is a picture of Louie Giglio. Louie is a pastor of a church in Atlanta, Ga. He's fairly well known in church-world for his passionate preaching and helping start a college ministry conference called *Passion* where thousands of college students gather once a year for a 3-4 day conference encouraging them in their faith. Louie is also known, and even respected in the broader culture, for his work fighting against human trafficking. His activist work helping women and men escape the ugly modern-day slave trade has been celebrated by people who have no religious convictions or any belief in Jesus.

In January of 2013 Louie was invited to give the benediction to President Obama's second inauguration. That's how respected Louie became because of his work and ministry. But, someone found out that Louie was actually an orthodox Christian when it comes to sexual ethics and marriage. What I mean by orthodox is that he taught his congregation what the Bible actually says and what the church has been teaching for 2000 years. So, Louie went from being applauded one minute to despised the next; he broke some cultural and secular rules: don't believe everything Jesus says especially when it comes to sex and marriage. Pressured, he withdrew from participating in the inauguration.

I think the Bible teaches us that when we live our lives with authentic faith in Jesus Christ, we live pretty confusing lives to the world around us. On the one hand, when we faithfully live out our faith, the world sees our conduct and is impressed by it. That's the angle that Paul is getting at in Titus 2:7-8 when he says, "show yourself in all respect to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame having nothing evil to say about us." This also fits 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

This is part of our calling; we should live honorably before an observing world. We should be honest, caring, and helpful. We should be the absolute hardest working people at our jobs with the absolute best attitude of all of our co-workers (and yes, I know where you work!). We should be generous with our resources; we should be faithful to our spouses. Our conduct should be exemplary and when it is, the world will not only be blessed by us, but they'll also be thankful.

Yet, at the same time, there's something in us that the world can't stand. The message we believe and spread is inherently offensive. Offensive in this way: it's humbling. The message we preach is that Jesus Christ has come to save us from ourselves. 2 Cor. 5:14-15 say, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for

him who for their sake died and was raised.” Jesus died so that I could be saved from living for myself. But our sinful selves love ourselves. We want to live for ourselves. Repenting, turning offends my pride; trusting in Jesus offends my sinful pride. So, the message that Jesus Christ died to save sinners, me being the worst of the bunch is despised by those who do not have the eyes of faith. The world hates this message. And because the world hates the message it hates Jesus. And Jesus himself said if the world hates him it will hate you, too.

So, this is the normal Christian life. And we see the precursor to this tension in our passage today. Last week, Luke amazed us with the glory of Jesus with our Lord being affirmed and commended by God himself. God spoke from the cloud and said Jesus is the One; He’s the One we listen to and follow. But there’s more work to do, so Jesus comes down from the mountain. Let’s read our passage (READ Luke 9:37-45).

God chose to communicate his truth for us today through an event, through a story so let’s examine the event and then we’ll get to the truth Luke wants us to see. Upon coming down from the mountain Jesus is immediately confronted with a need. A father has a son tormented by an evil spirit. And this spirit causes all kinds of physical damage to the boy. Because our modern, secular world is uncomfortable with the unexplainable; demons don’t exist, they say, so this must have been some medical condition these prehistoric dunces didn’t know about. But there are plenty of times in the gospels when someone has a sickness they say it’s a sickness. Now, vs. 39 says, “And behold, a spirit seizes him.” A spirit does. Not sickness. Not a chronic disease. A spirit. Yes, that is amazingly supernatural; beyond scientific explanation. And do you know what? It isn’t just amazing to us; it was amazing to them, too. Vs. 39 starts by saying, “And behold!” That’s a 1st century way of saying, “Look! Can you believe it?” Or Brian’s amplified version goes like this, “Holy Cow! A spirit seizes him!”

That’s what’s so amazing about this story. This spirit is wreaking havoc, a kind of havoc that defies human remedies. If it could be controlled by human will power or ingenuity, if it was a sickness that we could understand and figure out we’d do it, right? It’s precisely because it’s a supernatural problem that the people are astonished at the majesty of God found in Jesus.

What’s interesting about this story is that the disciples were helpless in providing for this boy. Now, at first blush that may not seem so surprising; who among us can boast in the power to heal a demon-afflicted boy? But look over at 9:1, “And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases.” I wouldn’t think the disciples have the capacity to help a problem like this, except we’re told in this same chapter that Jesus gave them power over evil spirits. So, if Jesus gave them this power, why were they unable to help the boy?

The key is found in Jesus’ answer in vs. 41. He says, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?” Jesus seems to be locating a problem, a deficiency of faith in the people (which people? Again, it doesn’t say, but I think he’s directing these words primarily to the disciples. When we read the rest of chapter 9, the

disciples keep being depicted as bumbling, stumbling followers; it seems that Jesus has a lot of correction for them in this chapter). And with this deficiency of faith, the people (the disciples) are twisted or distorted.

Now, I want you to notice something. This lack of faith that Jesus sees in the disciples is shown in their lack of ministry fruitfulness or effectiveness, not in their relational position (REPEAT). This is really important. Because here's the deal: if you walk with Jesus for any length of time, you will get discouraged by your lack of faith. You'll see how you are distorted, too, and you'll long for a pure and undefiled faith. But you will be tempted in those moments to doubt your position in Christ. But that's not what happens in this passage. Jesus doesn't banish people for their lack of faith, he expresses discouragement in their lack of ministry effectiveness. The disciples are unable to help the demonized boy; that's the result of their lack of faith. It's not that they no longer are a part of Jesus family; it's that they are failing to be as effective as they could be.

Something else that we might want to observe is this: you can read this exact same story in the gospels of Mark and Matthew. And in both of those accounts Jesus tells the disciples what they should have done. In Mark 9:29 we read this, "And he said to them, 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer' (or some translations say, "prayer and fasting"). So, when you put the Mark and Luke passage together, you see that the action of faith, the expression of faith needed from the disciples was a prayer of faith.

Prayer is at the heart of authentic faith in God in two ways. 1) When you pray you turn to God. That's faith. Friends, just your turning to God is an act of faith. Your prayer might be a doubtful prayer like, "God, where are you?" Your prayer might be an angry prayer like, "God, will you show up already!" Your prayer might be a prayer of despair, "God, I can't go on like this anymore." Your prayer might be a simple request, "God, will you help me?" Every one of those prayers is a turn towards God. That's faith. It's faith that he cares; it's faith that he listens; it's faith that he'll act; it's faith that he's with you. Sometimes, we don't think much of our prayers. Maybe we don't think we're saying things rightly. Maybe we don't think we're doing it the right way. But friends, any turning to God is an act of faith that God honors and blesses.

2) Prayer is faith because it's an expression of human weakness and divine power. When we turn to God in prayer we're saying, "God, I can't. God, you can." Even our angry prayers are this, "God, I know you can; why won't you?"

Friends, let's be more prayerful. Not to secure our position in God's family; Jesus has already done that for us on the cross. No, let's be more prayerful so we can be more effective in the work that he has called us to do.

Now, let's get back to the story. Jesus delivers this boy and the crowd goes wild. Vs. 43 says, "And all were astonished at the majesty of God." But notice the contrast that follows. "But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing." Again, the amazement of the crowds

is still front and center, and then Jesus says these words (vs. 44), “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”

I wonder why Jesus said, “Let these words sink into your ears.” Why didn’t he just tell the disciples; why did he say, “Clean out the wax in your ears so you really hear this?” I think it’s because the message was so utterly unbelievable or hard to accept. What do you mean you will be delivered into the hands of men? They’re celebrating you! They are marveling at all that you’re doing! Get this: at this point of Jesus life and ministry, the idea that things could turn south so dramatically where Jesus himself would be unjustly sentenced and killed is hard to believe. Everything seems to be going so well.

That’s the normal Christian life; that’s what we can expect ourselves. So, let me give you some things to consider. First of all, do good to others in faith, FBC. That’s why you’ve been saved. You are God’s workmanship, his handiwork, in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he has prepared in advance for you to do. Push back, my good brothers and sisters, the gates of hell with faithful service. And above all, push back against the powers of evil through prayer (and if you’d like to fast, too, go for it!). Prayer is our greatest work. It’s the thing we do to accomplish God’s work in the world today. How peculiar, right? That’s one of the reasons why we don’t pray. It feels so... unproductive. It feels like nothing is getting accomplished. But God’s word tells us the complete opposite. James 5:17, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.” What’s the conclusion? Well, if Elijah was a dude just like you and me and that’s what happened when he prayed fervently, just imagine what God will do when you pray fervently. So, FBC, let’s keep doing the good works that God has prepared for us beforehand and the world will marvel and be astounded.

Yet, be prepared for the opposition, too. Don’t expect a parade or any congratulations for your authentic faith. When the encounters the message of repentance and faith in Jesus’ name alone it’s not going to be received well. I read just last week that Sen. Bernie Sanders suggested that a Christian believing that Jesus is the only way to salvation should disqualify them for a governmental position. He termed it contrary to American values. The Christian life is a call to suffer. It’s a call to be misunderstood. It’s a call to be mislabeled by others. Don’t fight it, friends. Accept it in faith. 1 Peter 4:12 says, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” It’s not strange; it’s normal.

Now, we have to avoid some dangers. The first danger is discouragement. When things are hard or unjust it’s pretty easy to be discouraged, right? I think that happens when we have the wrong expectations. I think discouragement happens when we do think it’s strange that we are going through a fiery trial. So, expect the fire and you’re less likely to be discouraged.

The second danger is self-pity. *Oh, woe is me! Look how bad we Christians have it! Look how everyone is against us!* Friends, that's not the way of Christ. The whole Woe is me! Look how bad things are for us! is pride. It's a pay-attention-to-me life. That's not the way of Christ. We don't glorify Christ when we are like that.

The third danger is to strike back. Jesus didn't strike back, did he? He absorbed the blows of hostile men. He didn't curse back when the women of Jerusalem were cursing him. Friends, I know we're tempted to fight back. I know not fighting back looks and feels weak. But Jesus does not give us the permission to strike back.

Finally, the last danger is self-righteousness. Avoid enduring hardship self-righteously. Now, what would that look like? It's another form of pride! Look how serious I'm taking my faith in Jesus; I'm suffering for him! Steve isn't a faithful Christian like me because he's not suffering enough. We don't make Jesus look good with that kind of pride either.

What should we do? When faced with hardship, let us rejoice in the grace of God like the apostles. After the apostles were unfairly treated and threatened in Acts 5, the authorities let them go because they knew they had nothing on them. And in vs. 41 we read, "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." Count it a privilege, my good brothers and sisters, to share in the sufferings of Christ.

Key Vs. Luke 9:44

#### Questions for the week

- What teachings of God's word do you think are most despised by the world? How come?
- How would grade your readiness to deal with hardships and persecution as a result of your faith?
- What daily/weekly patterns need to change for you to be ready?