

## **“Dare To Be Different”**

### **Daniel 1:1-21**

*Series: Different Week 1: Don't Conform, Transform*

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Let's take a survey. The following list comes from the 100 biggest fads according to the British tabloid *The Sun*. Raise your hand if you, at any time, had one of these in your house.

46. Pogo sticks
44. Beanie Babies
27. Bell Bottoms
22. Barbie
21. UGG Boots
14. Slinkys
13. Mood Rings
6. Friends (the TV show)
4. Marbles
3. Lava Lamps
2. Parker Pens
1. Rubik's Cube

Fads are just one of the many ways our culture forms and shapes us, molds and makes us. Today we begin our journey to be DIFFERENT. Every day the culture tries to get you to fall in line, to squeeze you into its mold. As someone from another church said to me this week, “I think the greatest challenge facing Christians today is: how do I live IN this world and not be OF it?” When I surveyed several Woodside leaders they said the same. If you think the same as everyone else, if you consume the same as everyone else, if you do the same as everyone else, you will be the same as everyone else. If you want to be different like Jesus, you have think different, speak different, act different, love different.

“I dare you to be different!” That's how the Apostle Paul begins chapter 12 of Romans.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

‘Based on everything God has done for you – created you, loved you, given His Son's life for you – based on all that,’ Paul writes, ‘I urge you, beg you, plead with you, dare you to be different from the rest of the world.’ How?

**Do Not Conform to the Pattern of this World.** The Greek word here is *suschematizesthe* – it means to allow yourself to give into the schemes of our culture. The culture has schemes to make us in its image yet we also have a part – we allow it. The world exerts pressure and we give into it.

Some of you remember *Candid Camera*. Producer Allen Funt used a hidden camera and prearranged situations to catch people being their true selves. It was both funny and revealing. In the episode called, "Face the Rear," an unsuspecting person boards an elevator and naturally turns to face the door. Then three *Candid Camera* actors enter the elevator and face the rear. A hidden camera in the elevator captures the angst of the subject. To turn or not to turn? Finally, a fourth actor enters and faces the rear. Without exception, the person facing the front turns to face the rear. In one situation they make the subject take his hat off and put it on again. The social scheme exerted by the actors facing the rear is too overwhelming for that person to be the only one facing the front. The man allows himself to give into the scheme and face the opposite way.

If you allow it, the culture will get you to go the opposite way of God. It does this in a million ways, especially through that convenient little device in your pocket or purse. A study discovered the average user touches a cell phone 2,617 times a day.<sup>1</sup> *Time Magazine* also reports that the touch screen of your phone has 17,000 bacteria making it 10 times dirtier than a public toilet.<sup>2</sup> As gross as that sounds, these devices are spreading a more deadly spiritual virus. Todd Gitlin, one of the leading thinkers on media and our lives, recently said this: "The torrent of images, songs, and stories streaming has become our familiar world." This "torrent" determines what we see and what we don't, what we think about and what never enters our mind.

Take for example the TV show *Friends*, which ran for ten years and was the only TV show to appear on the 100 Top Fad List. It's funny but not innocent. A survey of all 236 episodes found the characters had a total of 85 sexual partners—and that's only counting those who appear on screen. How does this affect us? The media normalizes things. If you see likable characters on TV having sex outside of marriage enough times, it becomes not only acceptable, but desirable. Fred Fedler, author of a widely used college textbooks on the media, writes, "the media may constitute the most powerful education system ever known to man."<sup>3</sup>

What about social media? The average Facebook user spends about an hour a day on it which is just slightly less than the time spent eating and drinking and more than any other leisure activity with the exception of watching TV and movies (more media). And yet a study summarized in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* concluded: "the more Facebook hours logged on the social network over time, the more their sense of well-being and happiness declined."<sup>4</sup> In her book *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*, researcher Mary Jo Sales reports a conversation with a teenage girl at a mall in LA who told her, "Social media is destroying our lives." Sales told her, "So why don't you go off it? Seems

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Nelson, "We touch our phones 2,617 times a day, says study," *Network World* (7-7-16)

<sup>2</sup> <http://time.com/4908654/cell-phone-bacteria/>

<sup>3</sup> James Emery White, "The Beast in the Beauty," *Church & Culture Blog* (3-16-17)

<sup>4</sup> *AJO Epidemiology*: quote from Cassie Werber on Qz.com, cited in *The Week* (4-28-17), page 20; James B. Stewart, "Facebook Has 50 Minutes of Your Time Each Day. It Wants More," *New York Times* (5-5-16)

reasonable, doesn't it? If something is destroying you, let it go. Smash it. Get rid of it." The girl responded instantly: "Because then we would have no life."<sup>5</sup>

You have a life – a better life – outside the cocoon woven by the schemes of this world. It's time to break out and be Different. **Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind.** The Greek word for "be transformed" is *metamorphousthe*. It's the word we use to describe the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. Now think for a minute about the life of that squirmy little bug. Munching on leaves, crawling on land is all he knows. Then, he wraps himself up and goes to sleep for a while. When he wakes and breaks free of his bedding he is a completely new creature with a sleek body and silky wings. No more crawling. Now he's soaring. What a transformation! I wonder though: do any of the caterpillars say, "No thanks. I'm good here on the ground" or "I love it in this warm, secure cocoon" or "Me fly? That's a fantasy" or "Transformation is too much work. I'll just keep doing what every else is doing."

God has a different life in store for you. Why settle for crawling in the dirt, why stay wrapped in the cocoon, when you can soar with the Spirit of God? How does this transformation take place? Paul says, "By the renewing of your mind." Everything begins with our thoughts. The mind is the steering wheel of your life. What you think will determine what you do and who you are. Yet your mind and mine has been so molded and manipulated by the world, we are like the caterpillar in the cocoon. We think this is all there is. We don't know God has a different, better life waiting for us. Jesus wants to turn you around from the way the rest of the crowd is going. He wants to give you His perspective on life. You will see the world through His eyes. You'll think differently. I'm sure you look back on things you used to do before you became a Christian and wonder why you acted that way. You realize some things this world values are really trash and other things and people the world throws away are really treasure to God.

Bible scholar N. T. Wright tells about a friend who, as a teen, came home and announced to his mother he'd become a Christian. Thinking he joined a cult, she cried, "They've brainwashed you!" The young man was ready with the right answer, "If you'd seen what was in my brain, you'd realize it needed washing!" N.T. Wright adds,

Of course, he hadn't been brainwashed. In fact, again and again, when people bring their outer lives and inner lives into the light of Jesus the Messiah, things begin to come clear. If anything, it's our surrounding culture that brainwashes us, persuading us in a thousand subtle ways that the present world is the only one there is. A mood is created in which it seems so much easier to go with the flow. That's what happens in brainwashing. What the gospel does is to administer a sharp jolt, to shine a bright light, to kick-start the brain, and the moral sensibility, into working properly for the first time.<sup>6</sup>

The renewing of your mind begins when you **Offer Your Body as a Living Sacrifice to God.** What's a living sacrifice? Let me explain this by telling you about a dead sacrifice. In Paul's day, the Jews worshiped God at the Temple in Jerusalem by offering animal sacrifices. Lambs, rams, bulls were slain and burned up on the altar. It was a substitution. Instead of you paying the punishment for your sins, the animal paid the price. The animal's death took away

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Trevin Wax, *This Is Our Time* (B&H Books, 2017)

<sup>6</sup> N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone*, Part 1 (WJK, 2004), pp. 43-44.

your sin. Unfortunately, humans keep on sinning so an endless parade of animals paid the price. That is a dead sacrifice. Now this should be obvious but I need to point out once you offer your animal sacrifice, you don't get it back again. It stays at the Temple. You give it up. It's gone.

Then Jesus came to be the Lamb who takes away all sin. His blood, shed on the cross, washes away all our sin, once, for all, forever. This is why we no longer have altars and I, as your pastor, do not have to perform animal sacrifices. Thank you Jesus!

So what do we do now? Paul tells us, to offer, not animal bodies, but our bodies as living sacrifices. My body now belongs to God. Yet unlike a dead animal sacrifice, I get it back. I use this living sacrifice according to the owner's instructions. My living sacrifice doesn't stay at the Temple. Everything I do, everything I say, everything I see, everywhere I go, everything I touch and taste, everything I earn and everything I make is a way to serve the One who owns my life.

Your living sacrifice is lived everywhere, every day. This is crucial because there are two extremes we need to avoid if we want to live IN this world and not be OF it, if we want to be Different. One extreme is for Christians to totally embrace the world, conform to the schemes of this world. We already looked at the troubles with that. The other extreme is to escape the world. Some Christians withdraw into monasteries, small closed communities, utopian societies, even cults. Jesus never told us to do that. He lived in the world and He told us to go do the same. So what is the alternative?

As living sacrifices, we don't escape or embrace the world, we **Bless the World**. It is not our job to conquer the world, control the world or even Christianize the world. Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13, 14). You are to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcome to the stranger, clothing to the naked, healing to the sick, comfort to the prisoner and the Good News that God has come to set all the world's captives free through Jesus (see Matthew 25:31-46).

Daniel is a living example of a living sacrifice who blessed his world. In the year 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, Emperor of Babylonia, the super power of that day, attacks Jerusalem, captures Judah's king Jehoiakim, robs God's Temple of all its gold, skims off the cream of Jewish society and carries them all back to his capital Babylon.

Among the exiles are four young promising men: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Nebuchadnezzar's scheme is mold these Jewish boys into good Babylonians so they will serve as his advisors along with youths from other nations.

The king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Daniel 1:3-5

To wipe out their old identities, they even gave them new names which praise not the God of Israel but the gods of Babylonia.

Talk about brainwashing. They changed Daniel's clothes, language, literature, food, drink and name. He was far from home and, therefore, could not participate in offering sacrifices at the Temple. In fact, about twenty years later, Nebuchadnezzar would go down in history as the man who burned down the Temple of Solomon. So in other words, Daniel was working for the man who tried to destroy his people, his homeland, his religion. Nebuchadnezzar was not as bad as Hitler but he is certainly second runner up.

So what did Daniel do? He couldn't offer dead sacrifices but he gave his life as a living sacrifice to God. He learned the language, lived in the palace, even allowed them to call him his new name. But he drew the line on what he consumed. Today some call his veggie dinner the Daniel Diet. I'm sure it's a good way to lose weight. But that's not the point. Daniel The food and drink were unkosher and sacrificed to idols. Daniel and his friends stayed true to God on the inside and against the King's orders to show they answered to a higher King. Not only were they healthier on this diet, but the Lord blesses them with wisdom and understanding that far exceeds the culture's advisors.

In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. Daniel 1:20-21.

At the pinnacle of Babylonian power, Daniel influences and blesses the King with God's truth and he even outlasts the Babylonian empire when it is defeated by Cyrus and the Persians.

Where do you draw the line on what you will consume from our culture? I can't tell you what that will be. It is different for each one of us. Yet I can tell you how to find out where to draw that line. You need three things:

- 1. The Word of God.** Daniel knows the king's food is unkosher according to God's Word. For the next nine weeks, read every day and hear every week messages on passages from God's Word in the Different series.
- 2. The Spirit of God** Daniel was a prophet so God's Spirit spoke through him. As a follower of Jesus you have the Spirit of God. Prayer helps you listen to the Spirit instead of the schemes of the world.
- 3. The People of God.** Daniel was not alone. He had three friends to help him stay true to God and hold him accountable. The success and power of Babylon did not go to his head. The threats did not cause him to cave. You and I cannot go through this life as living sacrifices without other believers. You and I need to be in a Growth Group with other believers who will laugh with us, cry with us, pray with us and hold us accountable. That is the only way to break out of this world's mold.

She was mad at God – so mad she refused to believe He exists. Cancer is what drove her to turn her back on God – the pancreatic cancer that took her father's life in just four months. Her father was her everything. In her grief and pain she blamed God and became an atheist.

Then, at the gentle invitation of several friends she started on a spiritual journey. She started turning around again. In November 2011 she visited Woodside and met God. Her name is Hilary Walp. This is the way God transformed her:

Old friends from high school see the change Jesus has made in my life. I now have friends, who aren't necessarily believers, asking me questions and sending me prayer requests. When working as a volunteer with the PTO people notice my compassion and understanding for others in tough situations. When asked how I am able to be so nice or forgiving, I always say it's the Jesus in me. I am very passionate about how much Jesus has changed my life (which is why I'm always sharing about it). The way I share Jesus with others is by the difference Jesus has made in my life. They see the change in me, and I credit Jesus for it. After a long weekend visit with family in Syracuse, my aunt hugged me goodbye. As she did she asked if I was on drugs or if I found Jesus because of how different I was. I give God the glory.

I dare you to be different like Hilary.