

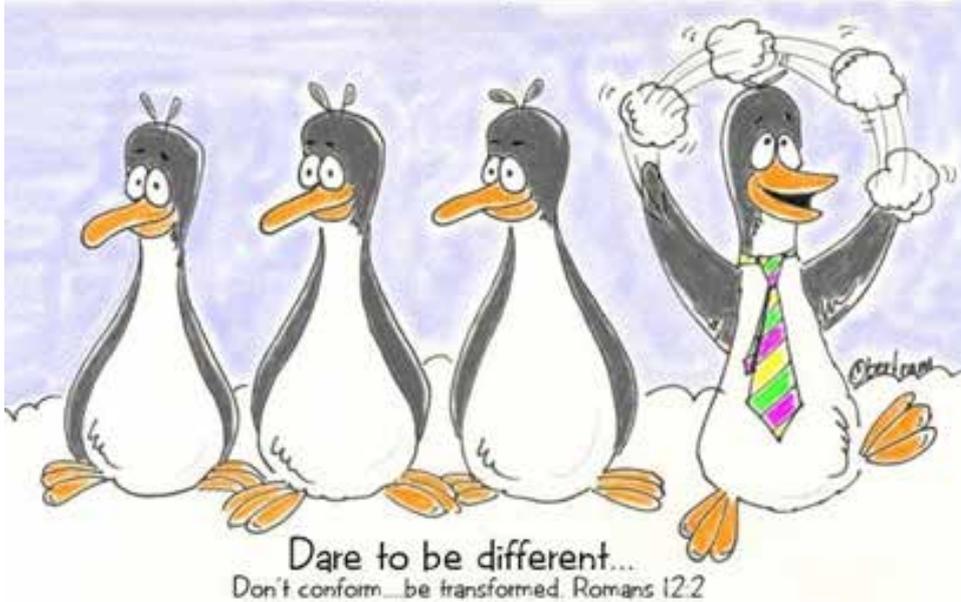
cell outlines
SEPTEMBER 2018

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DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Introduction

GOD's Graffiti by Tim Bertram
www.christiancartoons.com



This month we are looking at our call to be different. As Christians we have made a choice to follow Jesus, and this involves living differently in many ways from those around us. We are called to stand out, to live in a way that gives testimony and witness to the immense transformation that Jesus has made in our lives. But it's not always easy to stand out. In the book of Romans, Paul writes to the early Christians who were facing just this problem. They were acting, talking and living like everyone else, blending in with the crowd. Paul says to them: 'Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God' (12:2 MSG); 'Be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think' (TLB).

BORN TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY: THE STORY OF SAMSON

“ For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines.

Judges 13:5 *NLT*

Key learning points

- * As Christians, we have made a choice to be ‘set apart’ for God, and this involves living differently in many ways from those around us.
- * If we get distracted from our commitment to God and/or mess up, he will always gladly welcome us back to him.

WELCOME

1. Try some fun strength contests, eg arm wrestling, who can hold a large bottle of water over their head for the longest, who can carry the heaviest bucket of water, a press-up challenge or something similar.
2. Riddles

Share some riddles with your group. You can find plenty of riddles at www.riddles.com, or www.funology.com/riddles. Include Samson’s riddle from Judges 14:14:

**Out of the eater came something to eat;
Out of the strong came something sweet. (GNB)**

Have the group try to answer all the riddles you have selected, and then ask if they know which one came from the Bible. Use this to introduce the story of Samson.

WORD

1. The story of Samson is told in Judges 13–16. Read as much of this with the group as you can – some of the key extracts are given below. If you have a younger group, or group members that are not familiar with the story of Samson, you could watch a video clip on YouTube and/or read Samson’s story in a children’s Bible story book. See the following examples:

YouTube clip:

Samson Bible Story in Legos – www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBvcJO2PqY0 – 2m40

* Two simple summaries of Samson’s story

www.thoughtco.com/samson-and-delilah-700215

www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-story-of-samson/https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-story-of-samson

Judges 13: 1–5, 24–25 (NLT)

“ Again the Israelites did evil in the Lord’s sight, so the Lord handed them over to the Philistines, who oppressed them for forty years.

² In those days a man named Manoah from the tribe of Dan lived in the town of Zorah. His wife was unable to become pregnant, and they had no children. ³ The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah’s wife and said, “Even though you have been unable to have children, you will soon become pregnant and give birth to a son. ⁴ So be careful; you must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink nor eat any forbidden food. ⁵ You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines.”...

²⁴ When her son was born, she named him Samson. And the Lord blessed him as he grew up.

²⁵ And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him while he lived in Mahaneh-dan, which is located between the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol.

Judges 15: 9-17, 20 (GNT)

“⁹ The Philistines came and made camp in Judah, and attacked the town of Lehi. ¹⁰ The men of Judah asked them, “Why are you attacking us?”

They answered, “We came to take Samson prisoner and to treat him as he treated us.” ¹¹ So 3,000 men of Judah went to the cave in the cliff at Etam and said to Samson, “Don’t you know that the Philistines are our rulers? What have you done to us?”

He answered, “I did to them just what they did to me.”

¹² They said, “We have come here to tie you up, so we can hand you over to them.”

Samson said, “Give me your word that you won’t kill me yourselves.”

¹³ “All right,” they said, “we are only going to tie you up and hand you over to them. We won’t kill you.” So they tied him up with two new ropes and brought him back from the cliff.

¹⁴ When he got to Lehi, the Philistines came running toward him, shouting at him. Suddenly the power of the Lord made him strong, and he broke the ropes around his arms and hands as if they were burnt thread. ¹⁵ Then he found a jawbone of a donkey that had recently died. He reached down and picked it up, and killed a thousand men with it. ¹⁶ So Samson sang,

“With the jawbone of a donkey I killed a thousand men;

With the jawbone of a donkey I piled them up in piles.”

¹⁷ After that, he threw the jawbone away. The place where this happened was named Ramath Lehi (Jawbone Hill)...

²⁰ Samson led Israel for twenty years while the Philistines ruled the land.

Judges 16:4-22 (NLT)

“⁴ Some time later Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the valley of Sorek. ⁵ The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “Entice Samson to tell you what makes him so strong and how he can be overpowered and tied up securely. Then each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver.”

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me what makes you so strong and what it would take to tie you up securely.”

⁷ Samson replied, “If I were tied up with seven new bowstrings that have not yet been dried, I would become as weak as anyone else.”

⁸ So the Philistine rulers brought Delilah seven new bowstrings, and she tied Samson up with them. ⁹ She had hidden some men in one of the inner rooms of her house, and she cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!” But Samson snapped the bowstrings as a piece of string snaps when it is burned by a fire. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

¹⁰ Afterward Delilah said to him, “You’ve been making fun of me and telling me lies! Now please tell me how you can be tied up securely.”

¹¹ Samson replied, “If I were tied up with brand-new ropes that had never been used, I would become as weak as anyone else.”

¹² So Delilah took new ropes and tied him up with them. The men were hiding in the inner room as before, and again Delilah cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!” But again Samson snapped the ropes from his arms as if they were thread.

¹³ Then Delilah said, “You’ve been making fun of me and telling me lies! Now tell me how you can be tied up securely.”

Samson replied, “If you were to weave the seven braids of my hair into the fabric on your loom and tighten it with the loom shuttle, I would become as weak as anyone else.”

So while he slept, Delilah wove the seven braids of his hair into the fabric. ¹⁴ Then she tightened it with the loom shuttle. Again she cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!” But Samson woke up, pulled back the loom shuttle, and yanked his hair away from the loom and the fabric.

¹⁵ Then Delilah pouted, “How can you tell me, ‘I love you,’ when you don’t share your secrets with me? You’ve made fun of me three times now, and you still haven’t told me what makes you so strong!” ¹⁶ She tormented him with her nagging day after day until he was sick to death of it.

¹⁷ Finally, Samson shared his secret with her. “My hair has never been cut,” he confessed, “for I was dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as anyone else.”

¹⁸ Delilah realized he had finally told her the truth, so she sent for the Philistine rulers. “Come back one more time,” she said, “for he has finally told me his secret.” So the Philistine rulers returned with the money in their hands. ¹⁹ Delilah lulled Samson to sleep with his head in her lap, and then she called in a man to shave off the seven locks of his hair. In this way she began to bring him down, and his strength left him.

²⁰ Then she cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!”

When he woke up, he thought, “I will do as before and shake myself free.” But he didn’t realize the Lord had left him.

²¹ So the Philistines captured him and gouged out his eyes. They took him to Gaza, where he was bound with bronze chains and forced to grind grain in the prison.

²² But before long, his hair began to grow back.

Judges 16: 23-31 (GNT)

“ The Philistine kings met together to celebrate and offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They sang, “Our god has given us victory over our enemy Samson!” ²⁴⁻²⁵ They were enjoying themselves, and so they said, “Call Samson, and let’s make him entertain us!” When they brought Samson out of the prison, they made him entertain them and made him stand between the pillars. When the people saw him, they sang praise to their god: “Our god has given us victory over our enemy, who devastated our land and killed so many of us!” ²⁶ Samson said to the boy who was leading him by the hand, “Let me touch the pillars that hold up the building. I want to lean on them.” ²⁷ The building was crowded with men and women. All five Philistine kings were there, and there were about 3,000 men and women on the roof, watching Samson entertain them.

²⁸ Then Samson prayed, “Sovereign Lord, please remember me; please, God, give me my strength just once more, so that with this one blow I can get even with the Philistines for putting out my two eyes.” ²⁹ So Samson took hold of the two middle pillars holding up the building. Putting one hand on each pillar, he pushed against them ³⁰ and shouted, “Let me die with the Philistines!” He pushed with all his might, and the building fell down on the five kings and everyone else. Samson killed more people at his death than he had killed during his life.

³¹ His brothers and the rest of his family came down to get his body. They took him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had been Israel’s leader for twenty years.

For a creative approach to reading the Scripture, split into four smaller groups/pairs and give each small group one

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of the above Bible texts to read. Also give them a large piece of card and a black marker pen. Ask them to create a storyboard or some pictures that illustrate their part of Samson's story.

Then ask one person from each small group to read the text aloud to the group whilst displaying their storyboard for the rest of the group to see.

Using a coloured pen, discuss together, and mark on your storyboards any time Samson 'dared to be different'.

Using a different coloured pen, mark on your storyboards the times when Samson got distracted from his commitment to God by people and situations around him and made some bad choices.

2. Group discussion.

Samson was set apart for God. He was dedicated to God as a Nazirite even before he was born and was destined to do a great work for God – to 'begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines' (Judges 13:5 NRSV). As a Nazirite Samson would have had to stick to certain rules, which would keep him focused and holy before God. One of these rules was that he could not cut his hair. Because of this he would have looked and lived very differently from those around him, and so be easily recognisable as one set apart for God. In order to accomplish all the plans that God had for him he vowed to live his life differently from those around him.

But Samson messed up. He broke his commitment to God time and time again. He got distracted by the people and things around him. He experienced the consequences of his sin. But at the final curtain Samson recognised his dependence on God and he appealed to God for one more 'last chance' to fulfil his destiny. In his final act, he accomplished the purpose announced by the angel who visited his parents before his birth and he began the rescue of Israel from the Philistines.

Use any of the following questions as you find helpful to discuss this Bible passage.

- 🗨️ What were the rules that Samson lived by?
- 🗨️ How did Samson look different from others?
- 🗨️ How did he (or should he) behave differently?
- 🗨️ From where did Samson get his strength?
- 🗨️ Why/how did Samson lose his strength?
- 🗨️ How does he regain his strength?
- 🗨️ Are there times when we find it easy to be distracted from the way God wants us to live?
- 🗨️ What sort of things distract us?
- 🗨️ How easy is it to overcome this distraction and temptation?
- 🗨️ What are some of the consequences of losing sight of God's way?
- 🗨️ •What are some of the outward symbols of faith that Christians use today? How are these helpful? How could these be unhelpful?

3. Read Hebrews 11:32-34 (NLT), 39 (CEV)

“ ³² How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. ³³ By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight....

³⁹ All of them pleased God because of their faith!

We usually remember Samson as the judge in Israel who messed up, sinned against God, and spent his last days grinding corn in an enemy prison. Point out to your group that the New Testament does not mention Samson's failings or his heroic feats of strengths. He is simply listed with others who through faith 'overthrew kingdoms, ruled with

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justice, and received what God had promised them'. He is recognised with the Biblical greats and commended for his faith.

Encourage your group that we can take confidence from Samson's story that when we do mess up it's not the end of our relationship with God. God will gladly welcome us back to him and we can get back on track with the plan that he has for us.

PRAYER & COMMITMENT

1. Play your group the Star Wars: Solo Trailer.

📺 *Solo: A Star Wars Story* 'Crew' TV Spot (:45) www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUXd7p_vd3w

Draw out the phrase 'If you come with me, you're in this life for good'. Encourage the group that when we made our commitment to Jesus, when we decided to be in his 'crew'(!), it was to be for ever. We chose this life for good, just as Samson's Nazirite vow was for his whole life. The commitment we have made to Jesus changes everything about our lives. Because of that choice, we are different!

However, we know it's not always easy to stay faithful to God. We may not want to stand out from the crowd; we can easily get distracted or make some wrong choices.

Let's make a commitment today that we will stay faithful to God no matter what! If we've messed up, it's not too late.

2. At the time of writing the song 'This Is Me' from the movie *The Greatest Showman* is in the charts. The lyrics of this song speak of letting the world see and know who we really are, regardless of what others may think or say about us.

Play this song to the group (provide lyrics if they like to sing along) and ask each person to make a commitment to God that they will continue to live for him, to not get distracted, and not be ashamed to let others know who they really are (one set apart for God) and who they are living for. If any of the group feel like they have messed up, gone back on their commitment or been distracted from living God's way, encourage them that they can come back to God and start again. You could also allow some time to pray for people individually if this is needed.

If this song doesn't work with your group, you could use any of the following instead:

- 🎵 'This Is Me' – Camp Rock
- 🎵 'I'm Not Ashamed' – Delirious?
- 🎵 'Whatever Comes' – Rend Collective
- 🎵 'We Shall Not Be Shaken' – Matt Redman
- 🎵 'Keep the Faith' – Martin Smith
- 🎵 'Set Apart' – Worship Central (from the album *Set Apart, Live*)

'GO AND LIVE DIFFERENTLY': THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY

“ ‘Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?’
‘No one, sir,’ she answered.
‘Well, then,’ Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.’

John 8:10-11 GNT

Key learning points

- * Our lives were changed for ever when we met Jesus – we can no longer live as we once did, but have a new way of living and being.
- * We live differently in response to the grace, love and forgiveness of Jesus, which literally transformed our lives.

WELCOME

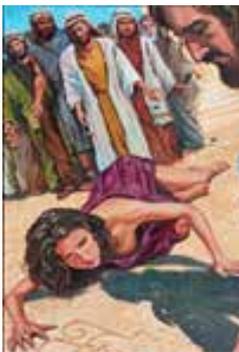
Try a 'taste the difference' challenge with your group.

One way you could do this is with different brands of cola. Challenge your group to taste the difference between a supermarket cheap brand and the leading branded drink. Or between Coca Cola and Pepsi. Or you could use ketchup, cereal, baked beans etc.

WORD

1. Print out some pictures from the Bible passage John 8:1-11 – the woman caught in adultery. You can do this easily via an internet image search. (It would be good if there was at least as many pictures as there are group members.) If possible, pick a variety of images that portray different perspectives on the story. Ask the group if they know what Bible story the pictures depict.

Here are three examples:



2. Read John 8:1-11

“ ¹ Then everyone went home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early the next morning he went back to the Temple. All the people gathered round him, and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery, and they made her stand before them all. ⁴ ‘Teacher,’ they said to Jesus, ‘this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now, what do you say?’ ⁶ They said this to trap Jesus, so that they could accuse him. But he bent over and wrote on the ground with his finger.

⁷ As they stood there asking him questions, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her.’ ⁸ Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ He straightened himself up and said to her, ‘Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?’

¹¹ ‘No one, sir,’ she answered.

‘Well, then,’ Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.’ (GNT)

3. Group Discussion

A woman, who had been caught in the act of adultery (sleeping with a man who was not her husband), was brought to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees. As strict observers of the Law they didn't like Jesus because he preached love, forgiveness and mercy as the true spirit of the Law. They felt threatened. They had already tried to make Jesus look bad in public, and now they had another opportunity.¹ And they were using the woman, however guilty she may have been of serious sin, simply as a tool in their attack on Jesus.

However, it is Jesus' response and challenge to the woman that we are interested in today. Jesus did not condemn the woman, but neither did he overlook her sin. He told her to go and leave her life of sin, and her life was turned around. She didn't get what she deserved according to the Law. Instead in Jesus she found forgiveness and love, and through that love she was presented with an opportunity to begin a new life and challenged to live differently – to go and sin no more.

'This story dramatically captured the gracious, merciful, forgiving spirit of Jesus along with his firm call to a transformed life.'² 'He essentially said to the woman, 'Don't sin like this again. Not because she might be stoned, but because grace had rescued her and she now possessed a new identity as a beautifully loved child of God.'³

Use any of the following questions as you find helpful to discuss this Bible passage.

- 🗨️ Look again at the pictures that depict this story. In what ways do the different pictures represent different aspects of the story or enable you to understand the Bible passage in a new way?
- 🗨️ What pictures depict Jesus' love, forgiveness and grace?
- 🗨️ What pictures show something of the challenge to the woman to begin to live differently?
- 🗨️ Jesus confronted the woman with a choice that day – either to go back to her old ways or to reach out to the new way with him. What choice do you think the woman made?
- 🗨️ When in your life have you been faced with a choice like this, and what did you do?
- 🗨️ Can you describe a time when you have been forgiven of something that you have done that you were ashamed of? What impact did God's forgiveness have on your life at that time?
- 🗨️ No-one knows what Jesus wrote on the ground. What do you think he may have written and why?
- 🗨️ Identify one way that you now live differently because you met with Jesus and experienced his forgiveness and grace.
- 🗨️ Identify one area in your life that you still need to work on in order to live in the way that Jesus has challenged you to.

4. Split into pairs and 'write' the rest of this woman's story. What do you think happened to her after this meeting with Jesus? How do you think she changed? How do you think she lived differently from that point on? Ask each pair to come up with their own story and then ask each pair to share their story with the group. (They do not have to write it down – they could draw a picture, or act it out etc.).

¹ The Romans did not permit the Jews to carry out executions, so:

If Jesus had ordered her stoned, they would have reported him to the Romans.

If Jesus had said she should not be stoned, they would accuse him of breaking Moses' Law.

² www.thoughtco.com/woman-caught-in-adultery-700206

³ www.charismanews.com/opinion/48635-what-we-can-learn-from-the-woman-caught-in-adultery

If you have time you could also write a modern-day version of this story, set in our time and culture.

PRAYER AND COMMITMENT

'Because God has placed you in Christ, making you holy and blameless in his sight, Jesus has called you to a brand-new life. A life no longer marred by sin, but baptised by grace – just like the woman caught in the act of adultery. He says to you: 'Go and sin no more. I have written a new identity and a new future for you in the dust and dirt of this life.'

Say to the group: Jesus wrote on the ground with his finger. He could do this because the ground would have been sandy, dusty and dirty. Have you ever written something in the sand at the beach?

Give each person a tray of sand. (If this is not possible you could use a free app called Sand Draw.)

Play some quiet music and read out the following questions one at a time. Ask each person to respond by writing their answer in the sand. One-word answers will be fine!

- * If Jesus was going to write a message to you in the dust/dirt/sand, what would he write?
- * How have you been changed by meeting with Jesus?
- * Write a message in the sand to the person sitting next to you.
- * Thank Jesus for his grace and forgiveness.

Any of the following songs could be appropriate for your time of prayer. They speak of the change that we have experienced when we met with Jesus, and our commitment to continue to live for him.

- 🎵 'Love Broke Thru' – TobyMac
- 🎵 'One Way' – Hillsong
- 🎵 'I Found Jesus' – Delirious
- 🎵 'Jesus Only You' – Martin Smith

STANDING OUT OR BLENDING IN?

“ Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God.

Romans 12:2 MSG

Key learning points

- * We’re to be set apart and different, not blending in with the crowd yet not being different just for the sake of being different.
- * We are called to stand out, to live our lives in a way that gives testimony and witness to the immense transformation that God has made in our lives.

This session is not split into four different sections. Instead you can choose from any of the following activities to draw out the above learning points. Further info that may help during your discussion is attached at the end.

1. All the same

Before your group meet, ask all group members to come along wearing the same thing, eg tell them all to wear a black T-shirt and jeans, or a stripy top etc. You could do this individually so that the group do not know that they will all arrive wearing the same thing. At some point during your time together, ask the group how it feels to all be the same! Would they rather blend in or stand out?

2. Where’s Wally challenge.

Bring along some Where’s Wally books. Split into pairs and challenge the group to a quick competition – which pair can find Wally the quickest? You can link to the theme of this session by saying that we are hunting for a guy called Wally on a page full of people who all look the same. Wally doesn’t stand out – it’s tricky to find him as he is not that different from all the other people in the scene. This session is about how much do we as Christians stand out in our culture today, and about how distinctive we are.

3. How important is it to you to...?

Create three areas in your meeting space. Ask your group the following questions and ask them to move to the area of the room that most represents their answer. Allow people to discuss why they are standing where they are.

Area 1: Not at all important – couldn’t care less!

Area 2: In the middle! Sometimes it’s important to me, but it doesn’t rule my life!

Area 3: This is really important to me and a big part of my life!

How important is it to you to...

- | | |
|--|---|
| ✓ Wear the latest trends? | ✓ Hang out at the ‘right’ places? |
| ✓ Keep up to date with celebrity gossip? | ✓ Ensure my friends know about my faith? |
| ✓ Watch TV shows that my friends watch? | ✓ Do well – study hard – at school/college? |
| ✓ Use language that my friends use? | ✓ Look out for number one (ie put myself first)? |
| ✓ Get on board with issues that my culture says are important? | ✓ Know about and/or share the latest meme or viral video? |
| ✓ Use social media? | ✓ Stand out from the crowd? |
| ✓ Join in with gossip about other people? | ✓ Fit in with the crowd? |
| ✓ Be seen with the ‘right’ people? | |

Include additional ideas relevant to your group.

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4. Romans 12:2

In Romans, Paul is writing to the church in Rome. In chapter two he is encouraging them to be different, to be distinctive, to be Christlike, so that people around them knew they were Christians, instead of acting, talking and living like everyone else.

Read Romans 12:2 in several different translations. (You may wish to give out these verses on a handout for each person, or you could write them on large pieces of paper for the group to gather round and read.)

- “ Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him. (CEV)
- “ Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (NLT)
- “ Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect. (GNT)
- “ Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how his ways will really satisfy you. (TLB)
- “ Do not be shaped by this world; instead be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect. (NCV)
- “ Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity. (J.B. Phillips)
- “ Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (MSG)

Can your group write your own paraphrase of this verse as well?

Discuss: What does it mean to be 'shaped by the world' or squeezed into its own mould? Or, how do we become 'so well-adjusted to our culture that we fit into it without even thinking'? In what ways does this/can this happen in our lives? Is this always a negative thing? What are the positives of 'fitting in'? What are the dangers?

Brainstorm as many specific ways as you can think of that we should 'think differently' – and what actions will this bring about? Note down your thoughts on some large paper/wallpaper.

Challenge each person to pick one of the things you have written down to put into immediate action in their lives.

5. How different am I?

Create an imaginary line down the centre of the room. Assign one far end of the line to be 'completely different in so many ways' and the opposite end to be 'absolutely no different whatsoever'.

Ask group members to spread themselves along the line according to their answer to the following questions.

- 🗣️ How do you feel your life is different from those around you?
- 🗣️ Do you come across as any different from your non-Christian friends?

When group members have arranged themselves along the line ask people to share their thoughts that guided them to where they now stand. Allow some discussion around this.

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Ask the group: When was the last time you chose to blend in with the crowd rather than follow Christ? Why did you cave to the pressure? What can you do to stand for Jesus the next time you are in that situation? Making a plan for the next opportunity to follow Jesus is important. Be prepared!⁵

6. Prayer

Give each group member a small ball of tangled-up wool or string. Play some reflective music (try 'Life' from Hillsong) and ask each person to quietly try to disentangle one colour of wool from the ball. As they do so, ask them to reflect on their own life: in what ways have they become so blended into their culture without even thinking about it? What changes do they need to make in their lives to be more distinctive as a follower of Jesus?

7. Shout Your Fame

The worship song 'Shout Your Fame' by Hillsong would be great to seal your commitment to living in a way that shows that you are a follower of Jesus!

Find it here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZspTRKyBjyM

“ Some say you're just a good man
Some say you were kind
Some say you are in the grave
But I say you're alive

Some say you're just a prophet
Some say you were wise
Some say you were just a man
But I say you are God
You are my God

I will shout your fame to all the earth
I will lift your name on high
And the world will know your
greatness
You are my God, I will shout your fame

I know you're the Messiah
You gave your life for me
And I know you're the only way
Jesus you are God
You are my God

I will shout your fame to all the earth
I will lift your name on high
I will show the world your greatness
You are my God, Jesus

I will shout your fame to all the earth
I will lift your name on high
I will show the world your goodness
As I live a life that shouts your fame
As I live a life that shouts your fame

Jesus, I decide to live
Live a life that shouts your fame

Other songs on this theme are:

- 🎵 'Life' – Hillsong
- 🎵 'We Could Change the World' – Matt Redman
- 🎵 'I'm Not Ashamed' – Delirious?
- 🎵 'Whatever Comes' – Rend Collective

⁵ getmorestrength.org/daily/dare-to-be-different



Further thoughts for your discussion.

'We're to be set apart and different, not blending in with the crowd yet not being different just for the sake of being different. Our lives are orientated around Kingdom values and priorities that are often different from how many people around us choose to live. Our number one priority is to live in a way that is pleasing to God, with values such as honesty, kindness, generosity, faith, love and hope top of our agenda. We are called to reflect the holiness of God in our lives and to the world around us.

'Many of Paul's writings give specific instructions as to how believers should live. He encourages us to live a life that is worthy and that gives testimony and witness to the immense transformation that God has made in our lives. But this is not just about what we don't do... it is very much about what we positively do! It's about our lifestyle, about taking positive action. A transformed and holy life is lived differently from the world around us as we stand against the moulds that our contemporary culture tries to squeeze us into.

'Christians are called to be counter-cultural – not in all respects, as though every single aspect of human society and culture were automatically and completely bad, but at least being prepared to think through each aspect of life. We must be ready to challenge those parts where the present age shouts, or perhaps whispers seductively, that it would be easier and better to do things that way, while the age to come, already begun in Jesus, insist that belonging to the new creation means that we must live this way instead.⁶

'Christians are called to 'not conform any longer to the pattern of this world', with its behaviours and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behaviour is off limits for them. Our refusal to conform to this world's values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behaviour and customs – it must be firmly planted in our minds – 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2 NIV). It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant. Only when the Holy Spirit renews, re-educates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed.⁷

'The key to it all is the transforming of the mind. Many Christians in today's world never come to terms with this. They hope they will be able to live up to something like the Christian standards while still thinking like the rest of the world. It can't be done. Having the mind renewed by the persuasion of the Spirit is the vital start of that true human living which is God's loving will for all his children.⁸

'God has called us to be different. To stand against the grain. To be a city on a hilltop (Matthew 5:14). And to be the change for a world that lacks hope. Realising you don't fit in is a good thing. You weren't made to fit in. You were made to fulfil your calling in Christ. You were made to fit out.⁹

An interesting web article: sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/124138-why-fit-in-when-you-can-stand-out

⁶ Tom Wright – *Paul for Everyone – Romans Part Two*

⁷ *Life Application Bible* - Kingsway

⁸ Tom Wright – *Paul for Everyone – Romans Part Two*

⁹ www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/standing-out-when-you-don-t-fit-in.html

DISTINGUISHED BY LOVE

“ ‘Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognise that you are my disciples – when they see the love you have for each other.’

John 13:34-35 MSG

Key learning points

- “ Love is one trait that Jesus clearly said would distinguish our lives from the rest of the world and that would show we are his disciples. Do people see us bickering, being jealous of others or gossiping? Or do they recognise that we are Jesus’ followers by the way we love others?
- “ To be set apart is to be so for a reason – set apart to go into the dark corners of the world, those places where there seems to be no hope, no joy, no happiness, no justice, and to bring the light of Christ to all who need it.

WELCOME

1. Try some ‘Spot the Difference’ puzzles with your group. You could print some pictures from the internet, using an internet image search. Or there are lots of websites that offer online ‘spot the difference’ challenge games, such as www.spotthedifference.com or www.puzzlesandriddles.com/SpotTheDifference. Or you can use a free app such as ‘What’s the Difference? Spot it’.

WORD AND ACTION

1. Show the group some pictures of groups of people with an identifying feature – eg clothing, uniform, haircut. For example: nurses, bikers, hippies, horse riders, faith groups, litter pickers, Salvationists, musicians, cleaners.

Ask the group if they can identify what/who the group are and how they were able to reach that conclusion – eg what are the distinguishing features?

Ask the group: What distinguishes us as Christians? How do people identify us? How do we stand out?

2. Split into two groups and give one group discussion ‘a’ and the other group discussion ‘b’. Allow some time for the groups to chat together about the Scripture and the discussion questions. Ask each group to prepare some visual feedback and then share with the other group. This could be some notes on flipchart, a poster, or even a short video!

a. Read John 13:34-35

“ ‘Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognise that you are my disciples – when they see the love you have for each other.’ (MSG)

Discuss:

- 🗨️ What is it about ‘love’ that marks us out as disciples of Jesus?
- 🗨️ How do we love others in a way that distinguishes us as disciples of Jesus? List some positive actions.

b. Read Philippians 2:12-16

“ ¹² My dear friends, you have always obeyed God when I was with you. It is even more important that you obey now while I am away from you. Keep on working to complete your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him.

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing. ¹⁵ Then you will be innocent and without

any wrong. You will be God's children without fault. But you are living with crooked and mean people all around you, among whom you shine like stars in the dark world. 16 You offer the teaching that gives life. (NCV)

Discuss:

- 🗨️ In what ways have you seen people living in a 'crooked' and mean' way in your community? In the world?
- 🗨️ How can we 'shine like stars in the dark world'? List some positive actions.

4. Think back on the previous three sessions and all you have learnt about our call to be different.

Provide a wide selection of art materials and encourage group members to design a poster that reflects what they have learnt. Share your posters with each other – maybe you could display them in your corps meeting place too. Be sure to include some practical action points on your poster of the changes that you have committed to make in your own lives.

PRAYER

There are two music tracks that fit with the theme of this session.

i. The song 'Glow' by Ella Henderson, which includes the lyrics:

“ We are fire, we are fire
And our love will burn
The flame will never die
We are brighter, we are brighter
Let's show them how we light up tonight
And we will glow

You could use this track to pray together about your commitment to be 'soldiers' of love, determined to love others whatever the cost, in a way that shows Jesus to the world. Pray in pairs for each other for boldness to take 'real love' into the world.

ii. 'Lights' by Worship Central, which include the lyrics:

“ Running through the streets, running with your life.
Holding out your truth in the dead of night.
Like stars in the sky, we are burning bright,
With your love.
This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine

Give each person a light; it could be a small candle, a glow stick, a little torch, or simply the light on their phones. If possible, create some darkness in your meeting room. Play the track and ask group members to reflect quietly on their own lifestyles. How brightly are they shining for Jesus? Ask each person to make their own commitment to Jesus to shine like a star for him in their everyday lives. As they do this ask them to turn on their light and let it shine brightly!

Finish by saying this Lenten prayer together¹⁰

Lord, I pray that you will stand with me at all times. Be with me in my strength. Be with me in my weakness. I confess that over the course of a lifetime there have been people, places and situations that have tempted me to go in another direction. Even so my heart is with you! I commit to you in faith. I commit to you in hope. I commit to you in love. I commit to you in my desire to live a life consistent with your word. Forgive me in my weakness and strengthen my commitment to you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour we pray. Amen.

¹⁰ Rev Dr Nicholas Hood III puccdetroit.wordpress.com/2013/03/14/lenten-prayer-lord-help-me-not-to-deny-you/

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Further info for your discussion.

Love is one trait that Jesus clearly said would distinguish our lives from the rest of the world and that would show we are his disciples. Do people see us bickering, being jealous of others or gossiping? Or do they recognise that we are Jesus' followers by the way we love each other and others?

'In giving this command, Jesus did something the world had never seen before – he created a group identified by one thing: love. There are many groups in the world, and they identify themselves in any number of ways: by skin colour, by uniform, by shared interest etc. One group has tattoos and piercings; another group abstains from meat; yet another group wears fezzes – the ways people categorise themselves are endless. But the Church is unique. For the first and only time in history, Jesus created a group whose identifying factor is love. Skin colour doesn't matter. Native language doesn't matter. There are no rules about diet or uniforms or wearing funny hats. Followers of Christ are identified by their love for each other.'¹¹

'How can we love others as Jesus loves us? By helping when it is not convenient, by giving when it hurts, by devoting energy to others' welfare rather than our own, by absorbing hurts from others without complaining or fighting back. This kind of loving is hard to do. That is why people will notice us when we do, and know that we have the Holy Spirit in us reflecting the love of Jesus.

Jesus' response is to love; love God with everything that you have and then love those around you in the same kind of way. Jesus doesn't separate loving God and loving others. And so the defining mark of a Christian is love.'¹²

'God has called us to be different. To stand against the grain. To be a city on a hilltop (Matthew 5:14). And to be the change for a world that lacks hope. Realising you don't fit in is a good thing. You weren't made to fit in. You were made to fulfil your calling in Christ. You were made to fit out.'¹³

'On a bright sunny day, when you first walk into a dark movie theatre, you usually remark about how dark it is. You probably had to stand in the back for a few minutes until the darkness seemed to clear and you began to see again. Before long, you could see without difficulty. Indeed, you seemed to be able to see normally. 'Normally', that is, until you walked out into the sunlight again and the bright glare forced you to cover your eyes. We Christians are often in the same predicament. We live in a dimly lighted world, where sin is the rule and not the exception. And yet we are really children of the light. We must always be on our guard that we do not become so accustomed to the darkness of our world that we think it is normal and conform to its guidelines. It is not normal. The dim moral and spiritual insight of the world is not the standard that the Christian is to walk by.'¹⁴

Just as a star sparkles in the night sky, so also we should shine in a world that is darkened by sin. What does this look like in real life, though? What is it that makes us shine like stars in the sky? Reading through Philippians 2:1-16, here are some ways believers in Jesus shine like stars.

- * Verse 3: They are unselfish.
- * Verses 3-11: They are humble.
- * Verse 4: They look out for the needs and interests of others.
- * Verses 8, 12: They walk in obedience to God.
- * Verse 14: They do everything without complaining or arguing.
- * Verse 15: They live in purity.
- * Verse 16: They hold firmly to the word of life.

¹¹ www.gotquestions.org/love-one-another.html

¹² Rob Bell: *Nooma Bullhorn*

¹³ www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/standing-out-when-you-don-t-fit-in.html

¹⁴ www.grace4u.org/Topical/landrum_ss/christianinfluence.htm

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'Imagine a church where all the members did each of these things. Imagine a world where people who claimed to believe in Jesus actually lived like it. I can rarely go a day without complaining or arguing about something. I can also rarely go a day without being selfish... at least a little bit. My suspicion is, I'm not alone. The truth is, if I started doing these things – if I stopped thinking about myself, started constantly thinking of others, stopped complaining about the inconveniences or irritations of life, and started living in complete purity – my light would shine a lot brighter. If we want to shine like stars in the sky, we have to start by being honest with ourselves. Are we shining brightly like the stars... or is our light clouded by our own selfish actions?'¹⁵

'God calls you to "shine like stars" in the midst of a dark sky. You are in the world, but you are not of the world. Can you imagine a night sky without any stars at all? That's what this world would be like if as Christians we simply blend in with the world. You need to stand out from the darkness around you. Complaining, arguing, impurity – these all turn out the light and keep us from fulfilling our mission of sharing the gospel effectively in the world. If you are going to back up your witness with your life, you need to stop complaining and arguing – you need to stand out from the world.'¹⁶

¹⁵ donotdepart.com/how-christians-shine-like-stars

¹⁶ www.rayfowler.org/sermons/philippians/shine-like-stars