



MERGE

the community we are meant to be

May 1st, 2016

The Peculiar Community

Embracing The Deeper & Truer Christ Story –
Christians are Called To Be Different Than Everyone Else.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 1 Peter 2:9 (KJV)

SAME BUT DIFFERENT

EPISTLE OF DIOGNETUS (CIRCA, AD 120-200)

“The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practice any eccentric way of life... They pass their lives in whatever township-Greek or foreign-each man's lot has determined; and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits. Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behavior there is more like transients.... Though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh; their days are passed on earth, but their citizenship is above in the heavens. They obey the prescribed laws, but in their own private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men-and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood, and condemned; yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor, yet making many rich; lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance.... They repay [curses] with blessings, and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes as evildoers.”

THE CHURCH, DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

(1 Peter 2:4-12)

1. We Are a CHRIST-SHAPED HOUSE.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:4-5 (ESV)

Luke 6:46-49

2. We Are ULTIMATE INSIDERS.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession... - 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

FOUR PRIESTLY MARKERS (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 43:20-21)

- CHOSEN - GOD PICKED Us!
- ROYAL - GOD EMPOWERED Us!
- HOLY - GOD DISTINGUISHED Us!
- OWNED - GOD ENCIRCLED Us!

Colossians 1:21-22; Zechariah 3:1-10

3. We Are ADVOCATES OF HOPE.

...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy - 1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV)

Hebrews 7:24-25; Luke 22:31-34; James 5:16; Jeremiah 15:1; Isaiah 6:1ff

4. We Are a COUNTER-CULTURE.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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. - 1 Peter 2:11-12 (ESV)

I Will Merge by...

- Memorizing [1 Peter 2:9](#).
- Making worship with God's people a priority in my life.
- Actively living a good and beautiful life before others.
- Giving my life to Jesus as Savior and Lord, for the first time.

WALK THE TALK

A Growth Group Guide

1. Give us your earliest memory of experiencing church. How did it shape your understanding of God and sharing life with others?
2. Can you recall a time you experienced God's "good and beautiful community"? What was that like for you?
3. Read aloud *The Epistle of Diognetus*. What stands out to you the most? What would he write about Christians today?
4. Look through the section above on *The Church, Different By Design*.
 - a. How is Christ the "cornerstone" of your life?
 - b. Why is it important to keep a corporate mindset when we are talking about being a Christian rather than keeping an individual mindset?
 - c. How has the power of inclusion, as opposed to the poison of exclusion, helped you become a more vibrant and healthy Christian? How can you help others find the door to the inside?
 - d. As priestly people how, can we become better at being "advocates of hope" in our world?
5. Read Romans 12:1-2: How does this passage reveal the peculiarity of Christians? How do we become "transformed by the renewing of our minds"? Why does this involve not being "conformed to this world" and what does that add to being peculiar?

SOUL TRAINING – TWO-BY-FOUR

A Personal Transformation Exercise

The Principle:

There are two essential takeaways this week. The first is that Christians are peculiar. The second is that their peculiarity comes from following their peculiar God. Put another way, as we spend time with this peculiar God, we will become more and more peculiar ourselves.

Have you ever spent time around someone or a group of people, and then been told that you act or talk like them? It's natural as human beings that we pick up things from the environment we are in. In our Christian walk, the goal should be to become more like Jesus. The two biggest ways we can accomplish this goal is to spend more time with Him and with His People. The more time we spend in the Word, the more we understand His heart and actions. The more time we spend around His people, the more we process what we are learning and also get to practice living what we have learned.

The Plan:

The plan for you this week is called "two-by-four": two hours with God and four acts of kindness. First, the two hours do not have to be done all at once. You could try thirty minutes on four separate occasions. (Some may spend eight times of fifteen minutes. Others may want to spend two one-hour sessions with God.) Second, corporate worship (going to church) can also count for one of your hours, but only if you go to church with a sense that you are meeting God, that your focus is on God. Too often we spend much of our time in church services thinking about things other than God. Here are some tips for how to go to church well: arrive early, take time to focus on God before the service begins, remind yourself over and over that God is the focus.

To fulfill acts of kindness, try to find ways to do something unselfish and unexpected to or for someone else. Try to think carefully about the other person and what would show love to them the best way. It does not have to be a grand gesture or cost lots of money, remember that most times, it's the thought that counts. Make it something simple, yet thoughtful.