

# THE OTHER SIDE OF NORMAL

## Session One When Pigs Fly: The identity of grace text Galatians 2:19-21

The point: O.D for a new I.D.

### Entry Point

The point where students connect to the lesson



#### Activity: Positive ID

Do you remember show and tell from when you were in elementary school? Show and tell was such a cool time. It let you get to know people and allowed you to see some remarkable things. You remember the drill. You would bring in something of yours that you really wanted to show to everyone, and then you would tell everyone about it. Because of this activity, everyone could better understand who you were and what stuff you enjoyed.

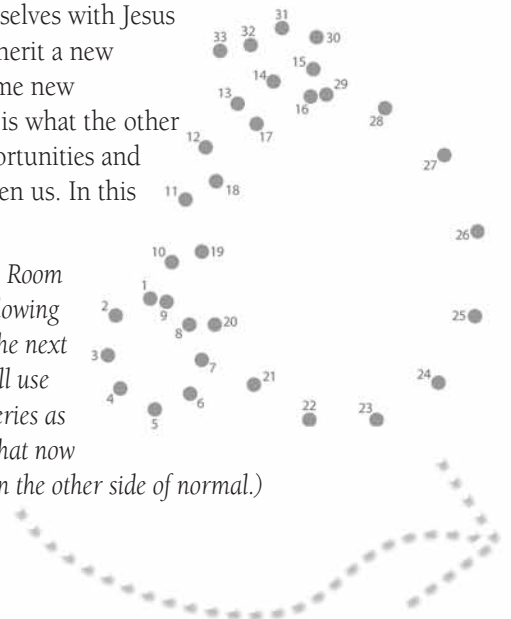
So today, let's play a little show and tell, only without the showing part. If I asked you to bring in three items that would best describe you, what would you bring in? Take a couple of moments to write these three things down. Then we are going to go around and share what items you picked and why they represent an important part of your identity.



**Connecting the illustration:** We all have certain activities, passions, and items in our life that are important expressions of our identity. We will grow out of some of these things, and one day we will look back and laugh and talk about how we can't believe we were so into them. On the other hand, there are some other things that we will grow into as our identity and ability collide.

When we as Christians identify ourselves with Jesus — His life, death, and resurrection — we inherit a new identity. But along with this new identity come new opportunities and new responsibilities. This is what the other side of normal is all about: living in the opportunities and responsibilities that our new identity has given us. In this series, we're going to learn to fly.

*(Teacher's Note: If your students went through Room 1228's Redefining Normal study, connect the following flying pigs picture to describe how this series is the next step to what they've already experienced. We will use the words faith, hope, and love throughout the series as cues to help you find places to remind students that now that they have redefined normal, they can live on the other side of normal.)*



# THE OTHER SIDE OF NORMAL

You might be wondering why the art for this series is flying pigs. Think of it this way: The Other Side of Normal is sort of like an orientation guide for freshman pigs who just got their wings. Now that you are flying and redefining normal on a daily basis, you probably will have a lot of questions. How do I use my new wings? Where can I fly? What dangers should I avoid? How can I avoid becoming barbecue if (or when) I crash and burn?

If you have these questions, The Other Side of Normal is for you. It's for those of us who know that we can never go back to the stale religion that used to masquerade as Christianity but who still need some help taking the next steps in our new identity and responsibility.

So come on — Let's learn to fly together.



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



## BACKGROUND

Religious extremists in the church at Galatia had convinced some believers that good behavior and perfect performance were the keys for God to accept and love them. But in this letter, Paul passionately argued that God's grace — which was demonstrated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ — is the only basis for our identity and acceptance. While there definitely are responsibilities that come with our identity as Christians (as Paul acknowledged), our right standing with God can only happen because of what Christ has already done for us.

The power and the mystery of the gospel is unleashed again in this letter as, like the Galatians, we rediscover that our identity is based solely upon the saving and sanctifying work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Our responsibility is to respond to that event by the way we live our lives.

## Discussion Questions

- 1. How were the Galatians trying to earn God's acceptance?**
- 2. How had Paul tried to earn God's acceptance?**
- 3. What are some of the ways we try to earn God's acceptance?**

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## Picture: Mirror

In the children's version of John Bunyan's classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, the pilgrims discover a mysterious mirror. There is nothing unusual about the front of the glass, but on the back of the mirror there is an image of Christ crucified. Everyone who looks in the mirror from the front side sees an ordinary reflection that includes the faults and imperfections that every human has. But anyone who looks at these people from the back of the glass sees the glory of the Son of God.

**Connecting the picture:** This picture shows us that our identity as Christians is about what God has done, not what we have done. Our holiness is not a matter of what we achieve; it is a matter of the grace God provides to us. This is the picture we find in today's passage.

## Text: Read Galatians 2:19-21

### EXPLANATION

Paul proved that he was just as much a poet as a theologian when he made the powerful proclamation, "I have been crucified with Christ." This provocative statement elicits a strong mental image, and it must have sent shockwaves through the church meeting in Galatia. Our old identity as sinners (or gentiles or pagans or whatever else) has been crucified with Christ, and now our new identity as saints and children of God has been resurrected to life!

This is not just a mind-blowing analogy; it is a powerful theological reality supported again and again throughout Scripture. This is a crucial truth for those of us who have moved to the other side of normal and who want to live lives of faith, hope, and love. Before we take one more step or flap one more wing, we are going to celebrate by cementing in our heads and hearts our identity in Christ.

Now you might be tempted to think that "Christ lives in me" is just a third-grade Sunday school spiritual platitude that gets handed out with fruit punch and pretzel sticks. Or you might be tempted to think that only new Christians need to know that we have died to our old lives and our old identities.

Remember that Paul wrote this truth to Christians. Let's say that again: Paul was preaching the gospel of grace to the Christians in the church at Galatia. Paul was double-dipping his converts (so to speak) because they were slowly being sucked back into the vortex of works-based religion. When it came to acceptance from God, these Christians thought that what they did for Jesus was more important than what Jesus had done for them.

But Paul reminded them not so politely (he called them "fools under a spell" in the next chapter) that they were not only saved by grace but also sanctified by grace. Plainly speaking, Paul teaches that we need just as much grace to live like Christ as we did to come to Christ in the first place.

### Discussion Questions

- 1. Why do Christians need to return to the truth that Christ lives in us? Why do we tend to forget or ignore this truth?**
- 2. How does God help us crucify our old selves? What is our role in this?**





# The point **Match Point** where students see today's point and match it to what's happening in their lives

**Picture:** Heaven's gates

*(Teacher's Note: Bryan Chapell's book Holiness by Grace was an invaluable resource in creating this lesson. You will find many of the ideas and concepts of this lesson further articulated and developed in his book. This story comes from that book.)*

Bryan Chapell retells the story of a man who died and faced the angel Gabriel at the gates of heaven:

Said the angel to the man, "Here's how this works. You need a hundred points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things that you have done, and I will give you a certain number of points for each of them. The more good there is in the work that you cite, the more points you will get for it. When you get to a hundred points, you get in."

"OK," the man said, "I was married to the same woman for fifty years and never cheated on her, even in my heart."

"That's wonderful," said Gabriel, "that's worth three points."

"Three points?" said the man incredulously. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my money and service."

"Terrific!" said Gabriel, "that's certainly worth a point."

"One point!" said the man, with his eyes beginning to show a bit of panic. "Well, how about this: I opened a shelter for the homeless in my city, and fed needy people by the hundreds during the holidays."

"Fantastic. That's good for two more points," said the angel.

"TWO POINTS!!" cried the man in desperation. "At this rate the only way that I will get into heaven is by the grace of God."

"Come on in," said Gabriel.

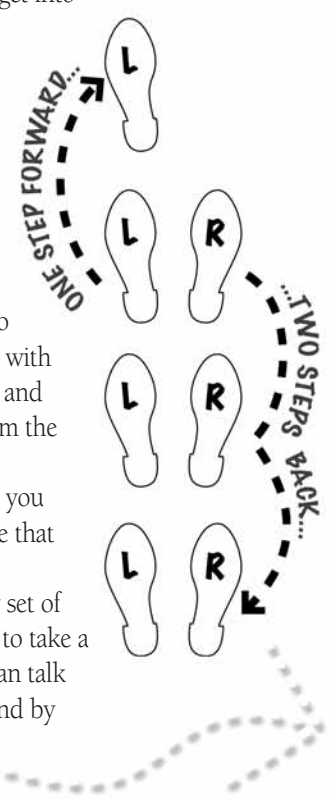
## APPLICATION

*(Teacher's Note: During this section, physically take a step forward or a step backward as you use these phrases.)*

Have you ever heard someone talking about taking one step forward and then two steps back? (You might remember Paula Abdul singing about taking two steps forward and two steps back.) That's what we're doing today. Most of us have taken one step forward in our faith with Jesus Christ. We have stepped forward and said that we want to become people of faith, hope, and love. We have stepped forward and said that we want to be set apart for the world, not just from the world.

If you've done this, congratulations! You have taken one giant step forward, and now you are on the other side of normal. Here is your diploma; here are your wings; go ahead and move that tassel thingy to the other side of your hat so that you can officially begin flight school.

But know this: When you move to the other side of normal, you inherit a whole new set of possibilities and responsibilities. We have a lot to talk about, but before anything else we want to take a step back and make sure that you have a firm understanding of your new identity. Before we can talk about your new identity, we have to take another step back and talk about your old identity. And by talking about that old identity, we're really out to kill it, to die to it, to crucify it. That may sound pretty extreme, but it's not nearly as extreme as what you will be attempting to do with your new identity. And to do it, we need to **O.D. for a new I.D.**



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That's the crux of what Paul is talking about here. He wrote that he died to the law so that he could truly live for God. Paul had been trying so hard for so long to earn acceptance from God. He was as strict and religious as they came, until the day that he overdosed on the grace of God through Jesus Christ. And in that moment, his old identity died. It was crucified. And at that point, the grace of God went surging through Paul's body and soul, killing any thought or inclination that he might be able to win or earn God's acceptance based on anything he did.

The moment that happened, Paul was reborn. He had a new identity. His spiritual DNA was altered to match that of Christ Jesus. Or as Paul put it, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (v. 20)

We all must **O.D. for a new I.D.** If we don't, the same vortex that suckered the believers in Galatia into believing that your behavior is your identity, not an expression of that identity, will rip our new wings right off of our backs.

## Discussion Questions

1. **How can we O.D. on our new I.D.?**
2. **What are some things that can help us embrace our true identity more and more?**



Let's all commit to daily O.D. on God's grace so that we are reminded of our new I.D. in Christ Jesus. As our identity and responsibility collide on the other side of normal, we will discover that we are capable of death-defying acts of faith, hope, and love.

**We will defy the laws of nature by dying so that we may truly live.**

**We will defy the laws of gravity by showing that what goes up can keep on going up.**

**We will defy the laws of attraction by loving the last, the least, and the lost because He first loved us.**

We can and we will do all of this by the grace of Christ Jesus, who came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.



# THE OTHER SIDE OF NORMAL

## Turning Point



The point where today's point changes our heart, head, and hands



Divide your students into three groups and assign each group one of the following statements:

- God loves you no matter what you do
- God accepts you on the basis of what you do
- God does not care what you do

Challenge each group to discover whether its statement is true or false. If a group thinks its statement is false, it must find a verse in the Bible that proves the statement is false and then rewrite the statement so that it is true. After about three minutes, bring the group as a whole back together and have members of each smaller group share what they discovered about their statements.

In 1997, the band Sixpence None the Richer released its self-titled CD. After being on shelves for almost a year, the band's love song "Kiss Me" landed on the soundtrack of the movie *She's All That*. Almost overnight, Sixpence had the No. 1 pop song in the United States. The song became the most-played song in 11 countries and reached the top of VH1's video countdown. The Grammy-nominated song appeared on sitcoms and soap operas, and the band played it on all of the big talk shows. After the band performed "Kiss Me" on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, lead singer Leigh Nash sat down to talk with Letterman. He asked her to explain the odd name of the band.

Leigh said, "It comes from a book by C. S. Lewis called *Mere Christianity*. A little boy asks his father if he can get a sixpence — a very small amount of English currency — to go and get a gift for his father. The father gladly accepts the gift, and he's really happy with it, but he also realizes that he's not any richer for the transaction."

"He bought his own gift," Letterman said.

Leigh continued, "That's right. C.S. Lewis was comparing that to his belief that God has given him, and us, the gifts that we possess, and to serve Him the way we should, we should do it humbly, realizing how we got the gifts in the first place."

Letterman was amazed. He said, "Well, that's beautiful... If we could just keep that little sliver of enlightenment with us, things would be so much better."

**(Teacher's Note: You can show a clip of this interview from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJdldjmb\\_04](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJdldjmb_04).)**

This is a neat way to look at how we live out our identity in Christ: We simply give back what has already been given to us.



## Discussion Questions

- 1. What is a gift that God has given you that you could give back to Him this week?**
- 2. How will you give it humbly?**
- 3. To whom will you give it?**

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Here are some memorable definitions of grace that apply to today's lesson. Go around and ask the students to read each definition and pick their favorite. Once they have chosen, ask them why they chose the definition they did.

- ♥ **Grace should not make obedience optional but obtainable**
- ♥ **Grace is God's ability to help me fulfill my responsibility**
- ♥ **Grace is confidence that our status does not change but our ability does**
- ♥ **G-R-A-C-E gives us  
God's Riches At Christ's Expense**

Next, give the students three minutes to write their own definitions of grace. They may also simply put one of the other definitions in their own words. After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to share their new definitions of grace.

