

ACT DIFFERENT

By Rev. Will Nelken

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(I know the title is not grammatically correct, but it mirrors (and contrasts with) the universally recognized slogan of Apple Computer: Think Different.)

Buck Owens wrote these lyrics that Ringo Star made wildly popular:

*They're gonna put me in the movies
They're gonna make a big star out of me
We'll make a film about a man that's sad and lonely
And all I gotta do is act naturally*

*Well, I hope you come and see me in the movie
Then I'll know that you will plainly see
The biggest fool that's ever hit the big time
And all I gotta do is act naturally*

Yep. Sadness. Loneliness. Foolishness. They all come naturally to all of us. If you want a life that's more than that, you'll have to find the *supernatural* Source: Jesus Christ.

I missed Friday evening's prayer meeting, but was delighted to learn that 9 others came together to pray.

The idea that power is inherent in prayer is a very popular one. However, according to the Bible, the *power of prayer* is, quite simply, the power of God, who hears us when we pray in the name of Jesus, and answers as He promised, according to His will and purpose.

James 5:16 *The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*

Conversation with God is a crucial part of learning to trust Him. And conversation with God *together* is a crucial part of learning to love one another.

The most significant prayer in the Bible is the one that Jesus offered on the night before He was betrayed and executed, after He and His disciples shared their final meal. You'll find it recorded in John 17.

What would be your final request on the eve of your death? What would be the focus of your concern for those who will remain after you have gone? If you had one final opportunity to tell Almighty God the sum of your heart's hope, would it sound something like this?

John 17:1 After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so He can give glory back to You. ² For You have given Him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one You have given Him. ³ And this is the way to have eternal life—to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one You sent to earth. ⁴ I brought glory to You here on earth by completing the work You gave me to do. ⁵ Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began. ⁶ "I have revealed You to the ones You gave me from this world. They were always Yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything I have is a gift from You, ⁸ for I have passed on to them the message You gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from You, and they believe You sent me. ⁹ "My prayer is not for the world, but for those You have given me, because they belong to You. ¹⁰ All who are mine belong to You, and You have given them to me, so they bring me glory. ¹¹ Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to You. Holy Father, You have given me Your name; now protect them by the power of Your name so that they will be united just as we are. ¹² During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name You gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold. ¹³ "Now I am coming to You. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. ¹⁴ I have given them Your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I'm not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to this world any more than I do. ¹⁷ Make them holy by Your truth; teach them Your word, which is truth. ¹⁸ **Just as You sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.** ¹⁹ And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by Your truth. ²⁰ "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ **I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in us so that the world will believe You sent me.** ²² "I have given them the glory You gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and You are in me. **May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that You sent me and that You love them as much as You love me.** ²⁴ Father, I want these whom You have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory You gave me because You loved me even before the world began! ²⁵ "O righteous Father, the world doesn't know You, but I do; and these disciples know You sent me. ²⁶ I have revealed You to them, and I will continue to do so. Then Your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them."

This wondrous unity is authored by the Holy Spirit through Jesus' prayer and our agreement with His aim. It is the result of God's protection from the nefarious wiles of our enemy, Satan,

and of our adherence to God's Word and purpose for our lives. The unity of the church is the key that unlocks faith in the people around us—more than the programs of the church or its preachers. The glory of God—whatever that is, for though we experience it, it remains a mystery to us—that emanates from His presence is a source of the church's unity. And mutual love is its glue.

Biblical love, of course, is not about well wishes, so much as good relationships and kindly treatment.

As Paul instructed us (and the church in Ephesus):

Ephesians 4:29 *Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

³⁰ *And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.*

³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.* ³² ***Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.***

Beloved, foul and abusive language is the order of the day in the world around us. Children learn it quickly. Women now use it as fiercely as men, and businessmen as often as sailors. Have nothing to do with it. God did not give you a tongue for such use. And if you give in to it, it will bite you, for *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits"* (Proverbs 18:21).

This warning is less about the impact of your words on others, and more about their impact on you! Be careful what you say.

Some people, whose habit it is to use foul language, in my presence will apologize ("Sorry, Pastor."). My ears are not too tender to hear it; it is their own heart and mind they are pummeling. It is their own life they are defeating by the expressions they choose.

Change your speech, and you will change your future!

Beloved, we live in a bitter, vindictive, vengeful world. Yet we are to practice just the opposite: tenderhearted kindness and forgiveness. Why? Because people need it. As Jesus taught us, we overcome evil with good.

But if we practice such evil—even in the name of justice, or politics—we will reap the fruits of it ourselves. Bitterness is a destroyer. Vengeance is blind.

James 3:7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. ¹⁰ And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

This. Is. Not. Right.

It is high time for the Church of Jesus Christ to act like the Church!

It is time for us to relate to others as Children of God, not as children of this world.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, you are a Christian *first*—above everything else. Above politics, above nationality, above culture, even above religion.

And if you belong to Jesus Christ, you must think, speak, and act like Jesus would. Now, no one does that without flaws, but we are still under obligation to practice it persistently, even if falteringly.

If you react to offenses as others do, you are no different, no better than they are.

How can we win the world to faith in Jesus, if we use the ways of the world to navigate our lives?

Jesus showed us the glory of God. He gave us a foretaste of Heaven. He sent to us His own Spirit.

If we do not communicate this newness of life to those around us, how shall they be saved?

It is not your weakness or lack of faith that scuttles God's purpose in your life. In Jesus' name, you have what you need. But you don't *use* it! You don't apply it! You tell yourself you cannot. You give up because it requires repeated effort. You are defeated by your own words.

Faith says what God says. Faith does what God asks. Faith repents and returns. Faith starts over again. Faith does not quit pursuing what is right.

These dark and tenuous days call for a light to show the way!

Will you be that light?

Put off the darkness of the world in which we live, and put on the light of Christ. Be different! Gloriously different! Kindly different! Mercifully different! Faithfully different!