

Message Reflections

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

Message Reflections accompany the [weekly message](#).

Recently in a meeting at work, the team I am on received the following instruction, “Starting today, we will adopt team norms.” The term “team norms” was new to me, so as the leader spoke, I did a quick google search. Team norms are the guiding principles for employee conduct in the workplace. They provide a standard set of behaviors and attitudes that allow each person on the team to know what is expected of them. Team norms include things like being respectful, listening to others, don’t interrupt, responding to emails timely, and remembering you are part of the team. In my day (I can’t believe I just typed, “in my day”) we called these things common courtesy or the unwritten rules of the workplace.

Everything was going fine in this meeting, until I heard two new team norms that were foreign concepts to me. First, “silence is disagreement.” Second, “we will agree 100% of the time.” Knowing it is impossible for humans to agree 100% of the time, my first instinct was to remain silent to show my disagreement. My second instinct, so as not to disagree, was to ask my questions in a way that did not reveal my disagreement but still helped me understand how a diverse team will agree 100% of the time. I learned that the team will follow another new team norm of discussing the things we disagree on, without emotion, until there is 100% agreement.

These new team norms sound a lot like programming robots to me, and I am still struggling to wrap my head around them. But life has taught me, and I am certain of this, there will be things at work I do not agree with, things I will not agree with, and things that will require me to approach with very few words. As I consider these new team norms and a broader culture that cancels anyone who disagrees with the prevailing winds of the culture, I keep coming back to the same question, “How do I continue to live and work with authenticity?” As the old saying goes, “How do I live in such a way that people know I am the real McCoy?”

The book of 3 John provides me good instructions to help me be the real McCoy. First, John subtly reminds Gaius to continue to be strong in the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit is our comforter, our counselor and our advocate. I don’t know about you, but in the days we live, more than ever, I need a divine comforter, counselor and advocate

every day! To be comforted, counseled and advocated for, I have a responsibility to stay strong in the Holy Spirit.

Second, John instructed Gaius to imitate what is good. I must be honest, every time I read these words in 3rd John, "Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God," I cringe a little. Don't get me wrong, I know the words are good and true, but they are so hard to live out. Our fallen sinful nature is really good at imitating evil. We see it all around us, and it's so easy to fall into the trap of what our eyes see... of what our hearts and minds are tempted by. We think, "Everyone's doing it, what is the harm of a little..." I imagine we all have a little something in our lives we are tempted to imitate that fills in that little blank.

But we are instructed to imitate and do what is good. WHY IS THIS SO HARD! How many of us have tried and tried to do what is good, only to be drawn in by the trap of a little of this or a little of that? The real danger here isn't the imitating what is evil. The real trap is in trying to do what is good. We are not instructed to try to do what is good. God isn't sitting on His throne saying, "Well, just try and do your best," like we are walking up to the plate in little league. No God is saying, "DO WHAT IS GOOD!" And to do what is good, we must be strong in the Holy Spirit.

In John 15, Jesus taught John what this looks like. Jesus said to John, His disciples, to you, and to me:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Trying to do what is good, apart from Christ will in the end be like dead and dry branches thrown into a fire. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches. Jesus alone is our source, our strength, and our power. He gives us the Holy Spirit, who lives in everyone who has believed in Jesus and named Him Lord. Remaining in Jesus is the key to moving from trying to do good, to living life doing good. And when we do this, our lives are fruitful, and our joy is made complete.

- Have you encountered a work or social situation where you felt pressure to compromise your convictions? What did you do? What did you learn?
- John instructs us to be strong in the Holy Spirit? What is your strategy? How do you remain strong in the Holy Spirit?
- Jesus gives us the picture of Himself as the vine, and we are the branches. Consider your life. Is it a fruitful branch or is it showing signs of being dry? What encouragement can you take from John's letter to Gaius so that your life is always a fruitful branch?

