

# Holy Living in an Adversarial World

## Bold from the Beginning

From an early age I was taught to be bold and outspoken about faith and more specifically, Jesus. There was a world full of people who needed to hear his message and I had a responsibility to share it with them. I can remember on multiple nights charging out of Youth Group ready to take on whatever my Jr High or High School could throw at me and ready to tell all of my friends about how their life was not complete without Jesus.

Do you know what I found out when I did this? Just because you have a conviction and bold opinions doesn't mean people will actually listen to you or take you seriously. When I confronted my semi educated friends with theories about moral living, heaven and hell, and our need for Jesus. I would often be confronted with apathy and at the very most, questions. These questions were difficult to answer ---- things like the intersection of faith and science, human sexuality, value of human life, alcohol, and as we grew older drugs. I found myself to be unprepared for them and as a result often looking foolish when I had opinions and views that could not be corroborated. I quickly realized that often my "bold beliefs" meant nothing to people and the way I was communicating with them actually alienated them rather than drew them in. I was doing a great job espousing **bold** opinions that many disagreed with, but I was not living with **courage** and allowing my actions to lend strength to my words. My efforts were not drawing people to Jesus, but actually pushing them away.

## Living in a Foreign World

I think many of you find yourselves confronted with this reality in your life as well. We were all taught to stand up and be bold about something. Whether that was our beliefs on God, war, politics, women's rights, segregation or any other type of social issue, we should have something to say about it. We were not taught how to respond when the truths we believe are challenged and questioned in an **adversarial way**. Each day, we are confronted with a world that rapidly grows more opinionated and the expression of differing world views is becoming increasingly more adversarial. Many of us have discovered that it is much safer for us to surround ourselves with likeminded people and think that we are truly making an impact as we advocate for our beliefs together and amongst one another. Just as many of us have discovered it is increasingly difficult for us to go into a world where we know people disagree with us and courageously live the life we believe we should live. Thus, many of continuously take the easy road and do our best to avoid the growing conflict in hopes that we will avoid being ridiculed or dubbed a bully. This conflict has brought us to a crossroads as most of us believe the world needs our **influence**, but we simply too **fearful** to attempt to share it with them. Less and less people see the world the way we do, our world is becoming a foreign place and we feel powerless to do anything about it. We recognize that something needs to change, but ignorance and fear keep us from trying to change anything. We can't seem to figure out how to balance our fear of an adversarial culture with our need to share our beliefs with the world. The **bold words or courageous actions** we need to make a difference don't seem to be available to us. Day by day we see our world inch closer to becoming something we no longer recognize and we feel that we lack the ability to speak boldly or live courageously as it falls farther into dysfunction.

What if it didn't have to be this way? What if we didn't have to feel as if our world was slipping away from us? What if there was a place we could go and find the tools we needed to make an impact, the tools we need to speak boldly and live courageously? **Speaking boldly and living courageously in an adversarial culture can be done and it can have a dramatic impact on our world.** Lives can change

because of it. How do we know? Well, our story today shows us there is a group of people that have been doing this for the last two thousand years.

### Faith in the Face of Adversity

The story of God show us that the early church rarely functioned in times where they were accepted as a **normal** part of life. The text we have been studying is living proof of that. We see Peter reminding the churches of Asia Minor that they have a calling to live bold and courageous lives even in the midst of adversity. Christians in this time were openly fighting a culture war and the popular vote as well as the government was not on their side. It would have been easy for them to blend in and lose sight of God's mission for the church, but thankfully, they did no such thing. Instead they locked on to this idea of "living hope" and allowed God to equip them to influence their culture and climate. They kept faith in in the eternal promise God made them and it impacted the way they lived.

In his short letter to the church, Peter included the words of Psalm 34 and he uses them as a rallying cry for the church to grow it's influence among an adversarial culture. **The Psalm tells us that if we want to enjoy our life we must not speak evil or lie, we must turn from what we know is wrong, and pursue peace fervently.** These things allow the believer to stay connected with God and stay focused in times of adversity. Peter then challenges the people by asking them the question, "If all you pursue is good, who will call you out for being bold in your pursuit?" He explains that even if they suffer for doing "good," they will be blessed and that should enable them to "live without fear of their enemies." He also encourages them to be prepared to explain why they are living differently in spite of the adversity they face. He reminds them that suffering temporarily for doing good is better than suffering for eternity because they pursued evil.

Peter closes this portion of his letter by reminding the church of the eternal reality. Christ has suffered for them so that they can come to know and have relationship with God. This suffering and sacrifice saves them from experiencing God's judgement just as God spared Noah from his judgement when he built the ark.

This letter reminds Christians that at the core of the life God calls them too is the tension between the temporary life we are currently living and the eternal life that is to come. It's the churches job to help people understand and navigate that tension but it must be done with grace, compassion and respect. The early church was functioning in a culture not much different from ours today. A culture with limited absolute truths, accelerated moral depravity, and an overall feeling of hopelessness. In addition to this, the government was out to get them and people actively made it their mission to sabotage the churches efforts to develop and reach people outside of itself. Sounds kind of familiar in a way doesn't it? Somehow they managed to not just survive, they managed to thrive and have a significant impact on the people around them. Why do you think that is? The government was against them. I doubt it had much to do with the laws of the country or the political influence of the church. Instead I think it had everything to do with the way the believers demonstrated living. Why else would Peter emphasize that point in his letter? Somehow, they managed to take a holy life and make it seem appealing rather than alienating.

Just as the early church did, if we want to influence people and restore some order to our world, we must give them a reason to believe in the hope we are attempting to profess. **If Peter is reminding the early Christians that bold claims, courageous actions, and faithful hearts are the keys to a holy life, maybe those are the keys we need to influence people as well.**

## Holy Living Today

The question you have to answer today is: **Are you living a Holy life?** At the very core of the Christian concept of holy living is the idea that Jesus was the only truly “Holy” person that has ever lived and thus serves as our example for the holy life. The trade mark of Jesus life was that he held people to a ridiculously high moral standard but relentlessly loved those who fell short of it. His love was so relentless and his standard was so high that he sacrificed himself for you and for the rest of us who could not attain the standard God had set forth. He made the very basis for holiness the idea that He was so concerned with your inability to gain holiness that He was moved to the greatest act of compassion the world had ever seen. **Jesus backed up his bold opinions by becoming a courageous sacrifice for all and an example of faithful dedication to his father.** He lived out exactly what he asked his followers to embrace. If you claim to follow Jesus then you must recognize this is key, this is how Jesus expected us to live. Are you living this way?

Are your bold moral proclamations being supported by sacrificial acts of love and a faithful commitment to the mission of God? **Can people experience the influence Jesus has on your life through the interactions they have had with you?** Holy living is a combination of bold opinions, courageous actions, and a faithful desire used in tandem to help people find hope in the message of Jesus. Holy living is presenting those things in such a sacrificial way that even people who disagree with you can’t find a justified reason to attack you and are actually drawn into relationship with you. Are people drawn to Jesus because of the way you live? Would your daughter see all those things in your response to her sharing that she and her boyfriend were going to live together before they were married? Would your gay neighbor see those things as you explain your traditional views on marriage to him? Would the waitress serving you dinner, who just happens to over hear your opinion on the abortion she recently had, see you express those things to your friend at the table? For most of you the answer is going to be no. In most cases today, conversations like this end in disaster, hurt, pain, and an even greater divide. Either you are too afraid to confront immorality, too scared to courageously and completely love someone whose lifestyle you disagree with, or you don’t care enough about the people around you to say anything. Whatever the case some aspect of the holy living model Christ demonstrated for you gets lost and chaos sets in. Damage is done and you are left with a broken relationship and feelings of failure, hurt, and pain. No one wins. That is why seeing the holy life for what it truly is must be the foundation for how you engage the world. **Living a truly holy life draws people to you and it draws people to Jesus.** Living a holy life asks you to sacrifice comfort for influence. It asks you to set aside fear and embrace courage. It asks you to be bold, but also to set aside judgement. It’s complicated, its messy, and its difficult but it is what Jesus calls you too and it is how you can influence people around you in a positive way, even if they are actively trying to stop you from doing so.

## Church Pays for Weddings Illustration

### A Bold and Beautiful Church

We are all called to **holy living**, to pursuing Jesus in a culture that at times is apathetic or even hostile towards what they believe he has to offer them. We have a responsibility to speak boldly for the gospel, live courageously for the gospel, and faithfully commit to the gospel, especially when it is difficult. However our pursuit of the greatest commandment: Loving God should not prevent us from following through on the next commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. We come from a long tradition of people who went to extreme lengths to love both God and there neighbor, they were so extreme about it that they managed to thrive in a world that had no place for them, didn’t want them,

and at times actively sought to get rid of them. The church thrived in a culture that wanted nothing to do with them. Maybe it's time we asked ourselves, "Why can't we?" Maybe the situation we find ourselves in isn't so bad after all. Maybe if we take the first step and own some of our flaws and failures we might begin to see people open up again. The church doesn't have to be a place that is more known for what it is against than for what it supports.

If we take a chance and actually start to back up our bold opinions with some courageous actions we might just create something beautiful. We can create a place where people can come to know the truth of holy living, a place where in spite of our counter cultural beliefs people want to be a part of us. A place where people can come and experience the bold, courageous, and faithful life God intended them to live. A place where people can come and receive the unconditional love God promises to us, a place that resembles hope, a place where lives are transformed, a place where people can come to know their true value, and most importantly a place where people can come to know Jesus. The crazy part is that we can do all of this in a culture that feels they don't need us, doesn't want us, and would rather we just disappear. We have the potential to be an influencer on the ground level. To influence the lives of people no one would have ever expected. **We have the potential to be both bold and courageous, to become something beautiful, we just have to put in the work to get there.** First though, we have to set aside our fear and embrace the freedom that comes from embracing a holy life. We have to commit the model of those who came before us; those who truly did embrace freedom despite a very real fear of danger. Then maybe then, we might begin to influence the changes we hope to see in our world.