

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

six sessions

Because normal isn't working.

CRAIG
GROESCHEL

Author of *The Christian Atheist*

WEIRD

SESSION 1

THE GOD KIND OF WEIRD

The most spiritually dangerous things in me are the habits of thought, feeling, and action that I regard as “normal,” because “everyone is like that” and “it’s only human.”

DALLAS WILLARD, *THE DIVINE CONSPIRACY*

Video: The God Kind of Weird (17 Minutes)

Play the video segment for session 1. As you watch, use the outline (pages 10 – 11) to follow along or to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

Notes

The problem with being normal today is that normal will get you sucked into all sorts of things that can be really hurtful to you.

Examples of how weird Jesus was (Luke 6:27 – 30):

- Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.
- Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.
- If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.
- If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.
- Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

Jesus didn't do anything like normal people did.

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13 – 14).

Normal may not be good when it comes to God.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Normal is broken. Normal doesn't work.

There is a God kind of weird. It's about:

- Being different from the values of this world.
- Living for the things that will outlast this temporary world.
- Laying down your life to glorify the God of the universe.

Think about what is considered normal today:

- *Time*: overwhelmed, burdened, stressed out
- *Money*: broke, worry, debt
- *Sex*: sexual sin, promiscuity, affairs
- *Marriage*: bitterness, lack of intimacy, divorce
- *Spirituality*: lukewarm Christianity
- Normal is living for ourselves and not living for something greater.

If we are normal like everybody else, then we are not following Jesus.

When you follow Jesus, you will be called weird.

Group Discussion: The God Kind of Weird (41 Minutes)

Take a few minutes to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?
2. Generally speaking, how do you determine what makes something normal and what makes something weird? If you can think of an example from your own experience, briefly share it.

Normal Is Broken

3. To be normal is to conform to common standards and customs. It usually means that something is ordinary, average, typical, or routine. Among people you know — family and friends — how would you describe normal attitudes and behaviors in these areas:
 - Pace of life
 - Personal finances
 - Relationships
 - Marriage/dating/sexuality
 - Spiritual life

4. In what ways, if any, does your faith community reinforce or challenge these normal attitudes and behaviors? Note any specific examples you can think of.
5. How do you respond to the idea that if we are normal — like everyone else — we aren't following Jesus?

Having faith often means doing what others see as crazy. Something is wrong when our lives make sense to unbelievers.

**Francis Chan,
*Crazy Love***

Jesus Was Weird

6. Among the weirdest things Jesus taught are countercultural ideas about how we are to treat others — both our enemies and our friends — and what our behavior toward others reveals about us. Here is what he had to say about enemies:

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you (Luke 6:27–31).

- In this passage, enemies are those who hate, curse, mistreat, slap, and steal from us. How would you describe a normal response to this kind of behavior?
- Have you, or has someone you know, responded to mistreatment in the way Jesus describes — with love, blessings, prayer, generosity, forgiveness? Briefly describe the situation and what happened as a result.

7. After addressing enemies, Jesus also challenges any notions about virtue based on how we treat our friends:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full (Luke 6:32 – 34).

- What do you think Jesus means by “credit”?
- Jesus challenges his followers to be different from “sinners.” Based on these verses, how would you describe what it means to be different?

Weird God's Way

8. Jesus makes it clear that the standard we are to follow is based not on the normal behavior of others — enemies or friends — but on the weird way God treats us.

I started to think that maybe I should beware of things that are cool and normal, because Jesus didn't seem to be either of those.... You don't get crucified for being cool; you get crucified for living radically different from the norms of all that is cool in the world.

Shane Claiborne,
The Irresistible Revolution

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:35 – 36).

- When you think of those who might be enemies in your life right now, what makes it difficult for you to be weird God's way — to treat your enemies with love, goodness, generosity, kindness, and mercy?

- Even if your efforts to love those who are hard to love seem to have no impact on them, how do you imagine those efforts might impact you?

Individual Activity: What I Want to Remember (2 Minutes)

Complete this activity on your own.

1. Briefly review the video outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session — from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session . . .

Closing Prayer

Close your time together with prayer.

Between-Sessions Personal Study

● READ AND REFLECT

Read the introduction to *Weird*. Use the space below to note any insights or questions you want to bring to the next group session.

● DANGEROUSLY NORMAL

“Normal” is what we want to hear the doctor say when we’ve had a medical test, but it’s probably not the assessment we want anyone to make of our spiritual health. When it comes to our relationship with God, normal may not be good; in fact, it might be dangerous.

The problem with being normal is that normal today will get you sucked into all sorts of things that can actually be really hurtful to you.... What is normal today doesn't make people happy or fulfilled.

Weird video

1. Use the following chart to briefly assess what constitutes “normal” in your life right now. For each area of life, consider attitudes as well as behaviors. How do you typically think, feel, and act in this area?

AREA OF LIFE	WHAT'S NORMAL FOR ME RIGHT NOW
Pace of Life <i>flexibility, scheduling, levels of fatigue or rest</i>	

Personal Finances <i>earning, giving, saving, spending, debt</i>	
Relationships <i>family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors</i>	
Marriage/Dating/ Sexuality <i>intimacy, connection, affirmation, communication, commitment, integrity</i>	
Spiritual Life <i>desire for God, practice of spiritual disciplines (prayer, solitude, journaling, etc.), growth in love of God and others</i>	
Other	

Based on your chart, how would you assess your normal life right now? Circle the number below that best describes your response.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Normal is not working.			Normal is mixed.				Normal is working.		

In what area of life would you say normal is most broken for you?

2. Author and pastor Dallas Willard writes, “The most spiritually dangerous things in me are the habits of thought, feeling, and action that I regard as ‘normal,’ because ‘everyone is like that’ and ‘it’s only human.’” In what ways, if any, have similar thoughts influenced you in the area of life that is most broken for you?

Example

The area of my life that is most broken: personal finances

My habits of thought ... I can't afford to give financially. Money is tight for everyone right now.

My habits of feeling ... I've had a hard week and I need a treat. Buying that gadget will make me feel better. Everyone deserves a little reward now and then.

My habits of action ... I'll charge it now and figure out how to pay for it later. Everyone carries some credit card debt.

The area of my life that is most broken: _____

My habits of thought ...

My habits of feeling ...

My habits of action ...

How might these habits of thought, feeling, and action be spiritually dangerous for you?

If you choose not to coast along the world's wide-open road
but rather to blaze a narrow trail with Jesus as your guide, then
you'll never settle for normal again. You'll want only one thing.
The God kind of weird.

Weird, page 20

3. The broad route is often the normal route, the one most people follow. But Jesus taught that the broad route won't lead us to the life he wants us to have:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:13 – 14).

- The metaphor of broad and narrow gates implies that there are some things that won't fit through a narrow gate. What might you have to let go of in order to pass through the small gate or walk the narrow road that leads to life?

- Read the Matthew passage again from *The Message*:

Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life — to God! — is vigorous and requires total attention (Matthew 7:13 – 14 MSG).

The passage contrasts practicing faith in our spare time with giving God our total attention. How do you recognize these contrasts in your own life? Answer this question by completing the two sentences at the top of page 20.

I know I'm taking shortcuts or practicing faith in my spare time when ...

I know I am devoting total attention to my faith when ...

If you take the Bible seriously, I trust you won't deny that the way normal people live today is miles away from what God intended. Separating ourselves from what the world considers normal is not just a matter of obedience. God invites us to dance to a different tune, because he knows what's truly going to satisfy and fulfill us.

Weird, page 20

4. In what ways do you think God might be inviting you to dance to a different tune?

What concerns, if any, does God's invitation raise?

What hopes does God's invitation stir up in you?

The kind of weird God invites us to be isn't a bad kind of weird or a weird merely for the sake of being weird. It's about being different for a purpose — becoming more like Christ and discovering the weird blessings of living God's way.