

Resisting the World

When I was in middle school, I started my first small business. The business was making and selling mix CDs to anyone in my school who wanted them. For those in the room who aren't an elder millennial like I am, CDs were like a Spotify playlist, except with way less songs on them. Like 10-15 songs max. So I would "burn" these CDs, which is also a very confusing term, for people in my school. They would bring me a list of the songs they wanted and \$5, and after a few days, I would bring them a CD.

And I'll be real with you guys: business was *booming* at Greer Middle School circa 1999. At least at first, I was one of only a few people in my school who had the ability to make these CDs. And between my parents buying the CD burner, the blank CDs, and me illegally pirating the music to make the CDs at *no* cost, I was making just about 100% profit. It was magical. Eventually, when other people in my grade gained the ability to burn CDs and I had more competition, I had to innovate. I began designing custom labels to go on the CDs with the track listing on them. I believe the business term for that is "market differentiation."

But then April 13, 2000 happened. On that day, the rock band Metallica filed a court case against Napster—the most well-known platform at the time for pirating music. They sued for \$10 million, claiming that was the amount of money they had lost when their newest album was leaked on the platform. Metallica won the court case, because there really wasn't even much of a case to be made the other way around. Napster provided a means for people to "pirate" (or, in other words, *steal*) music that they would otherwise have to purchase. And the courts decided that stealing is stealing—whether it's physical property or intellectual property. And stealing is stealing, even when you're stealing from someone like Metallica, who already sits on millions of dollars. So shortly after Metallica won the court case, Napster was shut down for good. And maybe most *significantly*, my small business was forced to close its doors, because of unforeseen shifts in the economic landscape.

But here's where the story gets a little interesting. Even though Metallica *won* in court, many people would say that they *lost* in the court of public opinion. As right as they were about claiming their music had been stolen, nobody I know of was going "wow—thank you, *Metallica*, for putting our society back on the path to the straight and narrow. For restoring order and morality to our nation." That wasn't the response at all. To most people, I think *Metallica* came across as kind of greedy and a bit of a buzzkill. To many, Metallica was now the equivalent of the dad coming down to the basement where the teenagers are drinking and dumping all the alcohol out in the yard. The near-universal

response to the court case was, “yeah—we know what we were doing was *wrong*—but who are *you* to stand in our way?” Just because you “made the music” or something?

And that’s because something had *changed* in the public consciousness. A shift had occurred where, in the minds of many, **it was actually worse to stop someone from pirating music than it was to pirate the music.** Pirating music had become so common of a thing for so many people, that anyone who tried to *stop* people from doing that was now seen as the *immoral* one—at least functionally. The moral “goal posts” of our society had been moved. Something that was very clearly *wrong*, was now seen as *right*. And people who advocated for what was *right*, were now seen by the majority as being in the *wrong*.

Now, for clarity, I don’t really have any dog in the fight of pirated music. At least *anymore* (I have economically recovered from having to close my small business). But I bring up that story because I think it shows just how *quickly* a shift like that can occur in society. It shows how rapidly the moral “goalposts” of a society can be moved. I could have referenced any number of other examples that illustrate the same thing. The amount of immorality, mudslinging, and nastiness that is now seen as *normative* in our American political process. The rapid redefinition of marriage, gender and sexuality. We could reference any number of different topics, but the point is the same: **things that were once considered *right* are now commonly seen as *wrong*, and things that were once considered *immoral* are now often considered by many to be moral imperatives.**

And **the operative force behind that dynamic, is what the Scriptures refer to as “the world.”** If you’re joining us for the first time this morning, we kicked off a new series last Sunday all about what we’ve called the three “enemies” of following Jesus: the *world*, the *flesh* and the *devil*. We said that a lot of the Christian life can be seen as a *battle* against those opposing forces. So we’re taking the month of January to learn more about each of those enemies, discover what their tactics are, and then most importantly, how to *resist* them as followers of Jesus. We believe that learning to do that has a tremendous impact on our ability to grow and mature as followers of Jesus, so we think it’s well worth the time to discuss it all.

And *today*, we’re talking about the *world*. So let me give you a *definition*, and then I’ll show you some of where we get that definition from in the bible. When we talk about **the world**, we mean something like **the value system of our surrounding society; the attitudes and behaviors that our culture tends to celebrate, pursue, and reward.** That’s what we’re talking about when we refer to “the world.” There are certain things that our society as a whole tends to promote and elevate as “good.” Things that they

celebrate and encourage and reward. And at times, some of those things *align* with the value system of Jesus. Things like truth, integrity, kindness, justice, beauty—and so on. Some things our culture values actually run *parallel* to the things *we* as God’s people are called to value. But to state the obvious, *other* times, they don’t run parallel at *all*. They run *contrary* and *opposite*. There are things we think are wrong and *immoral* that our world thinks are right and true. And *increasingly*, there are things we think are *good* and *true*, that our world actually considers wrong and *immoral*.

So, the pressure you feel to sign up for the dating app that everybody else your age is using and use it the same way *they’re* using it...that pressure that you feel is “the world.” The inclination you feel to pursue an ever-higher standard of living simply because that’s what your peers at work are doing...that’s “the world.” The discomfort you feel when someone who doesn’t follow Jesus asks you your opinion as a Christian on sexuality or gender or marriage or divorce—that *discomfort* you feel at the prospect of doing that is what the bible calls “the world.” **Essentially, anytime we feel a pull towards valuing the things everybody else values, or the discomfort we feel at not doing so—those things are “the world” at work.**

And this is important: **if you don’t ever feel any of those pressures or discomforts**, one of two things is happening. Either you are fully sanctified and therefore have no indwelling sin to speak of (okay, spoiler alert: it’s actually not that one). Or it’s **because you have actually given in to the pull of the world already**. It’s because you don’t actually perceive any *tension* between the way of Jesus and the way of the world. ...Which is a problem, because **the biblical authors seem to more or less assume that tension**. They often go out of their way to make *sure* we see it. Let me give you some examples of what I mean. We’ll put these up on the screen. First...

1 John 2:15:

Do not **love** the world or anything **in** the world. If anyone **loves** the world, love for the **Father** is not **in** them. Now just for clarity, that’s not saying we shouldn’t love the *people* in the world. John 3:16 makes it clear that God himself loves the *people* in the world. What *this* is talking about is not loving the *value system* of the world. The priorities of the world. It’s saying don’t make *their* priorities, *your* priorities. Following? Then, there’s...

Romans 12:2

Do not **conform** to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

John 17:14

Jesus speaking, says to the Father, “I have given them (in context, followers of Jesus) your word, and **the world** has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” “Their value system is not the same as the world’s, and therefore, the world doesn’t *like* them a lot of the time.

And then, about as plain as it gets, in **John 18:36**, Jesus says, point blank: “My kingdom is **not of this world**.”

So are we noticing a *theme* in those verses? **Jesus and the biblical authors firmly believe that there is a distinct *tension*—probably more like an *opposition*—between the value system of the kingdom of God, and the value system of “the world.”**

There is a noticeable, profound *difference* between the things the *world* values and celebrates—and the things *God* values and celebrates. Just to name a few... The *world* believes that sex is essentially “play” for grown-ups; it’s for having with anyone and everyone you want, *however* you want to have it. / *God*, on the other hand, insists that sex is a beautiful gift designed and intended for deepening a connection between a husband and wife in the context of a lifelong marriage relationship. Those are very *different* views of sex.

The *world* believes that those who disagree with you ideologically and politically are your *enemies*—even our *country’s* enemies. Which means they should be exposed, condemned, marginalized, and perhaps *prosecuted* accordingly. / *God* believes that you should “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”¹ Those are two very different ways of thinking about your “enemies.” The *world* believes your *money* is yours and therefore you should use it however you want. / *God* believes your money and resources were given to you by God and therefore should be used as *he* sees fit, to build the kingdom of God and to serve and bless others wherever you’re able. Those are two very different ways to think about your money. And we could go on with examples along those lines for *days*. The point is that the value system of the world is quite often very *different* from the value system of Jesus.

Now, that’s *not* to say that the “world” is *always* what we would call “*secular*.” There’s an interesting interaction in John chapter 8 between Jesus and the Pharisees. In it, at one point Jesus says to *them*, “*you* are of this *world*.”² Now here’s why that’s interesting to me: the Pharisees were the religious *elite* of Jesus’ day. They *prided* themselves on being unpolluted, unstained by the world around them. And yet Jesus looks at them and says “*you* are worldly.” Now, that should be deeply alarming to us if we’re thinking about

¹ See Matthew 5:44

² See John 8:23

it. Because that means that simply being deeply ingrained in a religious subculture does not guarantee that you are not being *influenced* by the world. I know people who are deeply religious, *very* involved in church, who would very much consider themselves men and women of faith—and still are disproportionately influenced and formed by the value system of the world. This is how pastors and deacons of churches end up having secret affairs. Because simply **being a Christian doesn't prevent you from being influenced and co-opted by the world and its values.**

Which raises the question: how *do* we make sure *we aren't* influenced by the world? I think it starts with understanding how the influence of the world *works*. We've got to gather our intelligence. So last week, we referenced this summary of the world, the flesh, and the devil from a guy named John Mark Comer. We said that the problem, in a nutshell, is:

Deceitful ideas	(the devil)
that play to	
disordered desires	(the flesh)
which are normalized in a	
sinful society	(the world)

So what is the strategy of the world? In a word, it's *normalization*. The world will continually *normalize* things that are *not* normal. Things that are, quite often, *opposed to* and at *odds with* the way of Jesus. This *often* happens, I think, with our *language*: our society will often “rebrand” certain actions and behaviors in order to make them sound noble as a result. John Mark Comer in his book lists out a handful of examples of how this has happened in our society:

Lust is redefined as love. Marriage, not as a covenant of lifelong fidelity but a contract for personal fulfillment. Divorce, as an act of courage and authenticity rather than the breaking of vows. The objectification of women's sexuality through porn, as female empowerment. Greed, as responsibility to shareholders. Gross injustice toward factory workers in the developing world, as globalism. Environmental degradation, as progress. The deracination of once-thriving local economies, as free-market capitalism. Racism, as a past issue. Marxism, as justice. Honestly, I can't think of a more gut-wrenching example than abortion, where the greatest infanticide in human history is recast as “reproductive justice.”

Okay, that's quite the list, right? And I fully realize there are some polarizing items *on* that list. You may or may not agree with his assessment on every single item *on* that list. But

if you're thinking critically at all, I think you've got to acknowledge he's got a point: **things that were once actually crystal clear moral issues are rebranded and repackaged so as to make them seem righteous.** British author Theo Hobson summarizes the phenomenon like this:

*What was universally **condemned** is now **celebrated**. What **was** universally **celebrated** is now **condemned**. And those who **refuse** to celebrate are **condemned**.*

This is “the world” at work: *normalization*. Now, the *trick* is that for followers of Jesus, normalization may or may not make us think exactly the same way as the world. It may just move us in that *direction*. So the world believes that there’s nothing wrong with sleeping with anyone and everyone, no matter your connection or lack of connection with them. Most of us who are followers of Jesus aren’t going to just wake up one day and all-of-a-sudden buy into *that* narrative around sex. *But* what we might do overtime is compromise in that *direction*. We may decide over time that if *that’s* what the world does, well then surely it’s not a big deal for me to sleep with my *boyfriend* or *girlfriend* who I really *love*. I mean after all, I’m way more committed to them than most in the world are to the person *they’re* hooking up with. We think, “at least I’m not doing *that*.”

Or pick any other example. *Consumerism* and *materialism*. *Gossip*. *Money*. *Relationships*. *Friendships*. *Parenting*. There are *narratives* in the world about how all of those things work. And even if the world can’t get us to buy into the whole *narrative*, it can absolutely get us to overlook *movement* in that *direction*. And just to be honest, I think this has happened a *lot* with followers of Jesus in the 21st century. I think there are probably quite a few areas where we, individually and collectively, have strayed pretty far from the teachings of the Scriptures, and have justified it by saying “well at least we’re not doing *that*. At least I don’t treat people like *that*. At least I don’t talk like *that*. At least I don’t think about sex, money, possessions, morality, like *those* people do. ...So I’m probably good.” It’s like some of us functionally believe God grades on a curve. Like when we get to heaven, he’s gonna say, “well, you did do a whole bunch of stuff I expressly said not to do...but you did a little better than the world around you, so I’ll give you a pass!”

I don’t think that’s how it works. I think the biblical authors *meant* the stuff they said. I think Jesus *meant* the stuff he said. One of my favorite Christian authors has a series of books he wrote just called *What if Jesus Was Serious?*³ I love that language. What if Jesus was *serious* about lust being as big of a problem as adultery? What if Jesus was

³ These are by author Skye Jethani. Most of them can be found [here](#).

serious about anger and self-righteous frustration being as big of a problem as murder? What if Jesus was *serious* about not storing up treasure on earth and instead, giving to those in need? What if Jesus was *serious* about praying for those who persecute you, and not just posting passive-aggressively about them on social media? What if Jesus was *serious* about the stuff he said? Following Jesus means taking Jesus at his word. Even if some of the stuff he says is a complete 180 from the way of the world, we take him at his word. Make sense?

Okay. So now that we're aware of the *strategy* of the world, how do we *resist* the influence of the world? **One thing it's not is just shutting ourselves off from the world.** Jesus makes that clear at one point in the gospel of John when he says that his prayer *isn't* that God would take us *out of* the world⁴—if he did *that*, the world would never have any way to see the beauty of a life with Jesus. *Instead*, we need to find a way to live *within* the world, without being *formed by* the world and its values. So I've got three things for you here, with an emphasis on the third one. First, we need...

A better story

Let's look one more time at that passage we read from Romans 12, v. 2. It says:

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, **but (instead)** be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

So notice what Paul just said. He said the *alternative* to being “conform(ed) to the pattern of this world,” is to be *transformed* by the “renewing” of our “minds.” Here's what I think he means there. **In order to avoid being influenced by the world, you need to saturate your mind and imagination in a better story than the one the world offers.** For followers of Jesus, that happens largely by regular interaction with the story of God laid out in the Scriptures. *This book* is how we get to know the story God has set us into as his people. It's not the *only* way—we also need personal interaction with him via the Holy Spirit. We also need *community*, which we'll touch on here in a minute. We do need other means too. But **we certainly don't need less than this.**

So I would just ask you: what does your relationship look like with this book? Is there a *desire* in you to get yourself into this story, on a regular basis? *And*, I'll add to that, is there a *willingness* to do that, even on days when the *desire* is not there? I once heard a pastor say that “if we don't know the Scriptures, we will perpetually be enslaved to

⁴ See John 17:15

whatever *sounds* right in the moment.”⁵ I think that’s spot-on. If you’re not grounded in the story of God, you’re going to be drawn towards whatever other story the world is currently telling. So, follower of Jesus: what does your interaction with *this book* look like? Because if you want to resist the story of the world, you need to familiarize yourself with a *better* story. / *Second* thing you’ll need, is...

A better community

Look with me on-screen at this from Hebrews 3:12–13:

*See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. **But encourage** one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that **none** of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.*⁶

Do you hear the language of that passage? How do we make sure that none of us has a “sinful, unbelieving heart” that “turns away from the living God” (which is just one way of saying ‘*how do we make sure we aren’t overtaken by the pull towards the world?*’) How do we make sure of that? According to what we just read, it’s by “encouraging *one another* daily.” **Hebrews just said that if you love and follow Jesus today, one essential way to make sure you’re still loving and following Jesus in ten years is to exist within a community of other followers of Jesus.** A community that can encourage you, challenge you, prod you, point you towards what is good and true and right. Who can remind you of and point you *to* that better story. *That’s* how you make sure you’re still following Jesus in ten, twenty, fifty years from now.

I’ll state it even stronger. I’ll make you a *bet*. Those of you who, right now, would claim to know and follow Jesus, but you’re doing it largely *alone*... Those of you who *don’t* have meaningful, deep, regular relationships with other followers of Jesus... Those of you who aren’t a part of a LifeGroup here at City Church or some other equivalent of that elsewhere. **If you continue to operate that way, I am willing to bet you that in ten years you are not actively following Jesus—at least not in any accurate sense of that phrase.** That’s how much I *believe* what Hebrews 3 just said. If you want to be sure that your heart is not *hardened* by the deceitfulness of sin over time, you will need what Hebrews says you need. And that can’t happen just by showing up here on Sundays. Hebrews says you need that to happen “...as long as it is called ‘today,’”—which, I don’t know if you’ve noticed...is pretty much every day.

⁵ Pretty sure this came from Matt Chandler.

⁶ v. 12-13

~~This is why we say all the time around here that if you are not a part of a LifeGroup, you are missing at least *half* of what City Church is about. You *might* be missing *more* than half of what following Jesus is about. Following Jesus was *designed* to happen in community. End of sentence. Together with others is where we learn to *persevere* in our faith. It's where we learn to resist the pull towards being formed by the world around us. And it's where we learn to put on display the difference that Jesus makes in our lives.~~

Next one—which is arguably the most important. To resist the influence of the world, you will need...

A better ending

Here's how we can ultimately endure against the power of the world: **because we know how the story of the world ends.** ~~In John 16, Jesus warns his disciples that things are about to get real dicey for them. They're going to be kicked out of the synagogues, they're going to be hated, persecuted, ostracized, marginalized—you name it. Things are gonna go pretty terrible for a bit.~~

~~And then Jesus says the strangest thing. He says "I have told you these things, so that in me, you might have peace." I'm sorry, what? What, Jesus? How in the world would knowing any of that lead to peace? Jesus explains it next. He says, in John 16:33, "In this world you *will* have trouble. But take heart! For I have *overcome* the world." "In this world," Jesus says, "you *will* have trouble." That's a *promise*. And in context, Jesus doesn't just mean *general* trouble; he's not just talking about sickness or death or general frustration at life. In context, he's talking specifically about *opposition from* "the world." *Grief. Persecution. Marginalization. Being looked down upon, judged and dismissed* by people who don't share your values. People looking down their noses at you and concluding that *you*, because of your faith and your beliefs, are the problem with the world. "In this world," Jesus says, you'll have *that* kind of trouble.~~

"But," Jesus says, "take heart...I have *overcome* the world." In the *short* term, Jesus says, you will be *grieved* while the world rejoices. But in the *long* term, you will *rejoice*. At the cross, Jesus gave the ways of this world an expiration date. 1 John 2: "...the world and its desires are passing away, but whoever does the will of *God* lives *forever*."⁷ This is the firm kind of hope we stand in as God's people: we know how the story ends. Which gives us somewhere to *point* our grief. Something to *do* with it in the meantime. *Namely*, offer it up to the one who grieves *with* us, and has overcome the world *for* us. **We overcome the world the same way Jesus did: through the cross. Because of the cross, you possess something the world can't take away. You hold in your hands**

⁷ v. 17

something the world will never have: *permanent acceptance and security from the one who runs it all*. “Take heart, for *he* has overcome the world.” It starts there.

And in order to *realize* those realities at a tangible level, you will need to...

Put it (all) into *practice*

As we highlighted last week, the way we change as human beings is through what we *practice*. Not just what we *hear*, not just what we *know*, not even what we *agree* with—but what we *put into active, repetitive, practice*. So, we told you that we put together a *practice guide* for this series. It lays out *practices* to resist the “enemy” that we’re talking about each particular week.

This week, as a way to resist the *world*, we’ve highlighted the practice of “abstinence.” Now, let me explain. Some of you upon hearing that were like, “I’m gonna sit this one out.” This is not the same type of abstinence that was likely taught in your sixth grade Sex Ed curriculum (although if you’re single, that could be a good practice for you too). “Abstinence” is actually a term followers of Jesus have used for centuries to talk about any time that we choose to “abstain” from *any* activity for a set length of time. Often, some church traditions will advocate for this practice during the Lent season. You’ll hear about people abstaining from soda, or chocolate, or alcohol, or any number of other things, leading up to Easter.

But for this series specifically, we are suggesting abstaining from some type of *media*. The idea is that for *most* of us, our most regular exposure to “the world” comes from two places. First, the *people* in our lives that don’t follow Jesus; whether that’s friends, family members, coworkers, classmates, neighbors—you name it. But to state the obvious, we can’t reasonably “abstain” from them. Maybe we would like to, which is a different teaching for a different day—but we *can’t*. Or at least *shouldn’t*. *That* would be what Jesus calls “going *out* of the world,” which he says followers of Jesus *shouldn’t* do.

But the *second* most frequent exposure most of us have to the world is through various forms of *media*. That could be streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, and the like). It could be cable TV, cable news, or movies. For a lot of us, it’s probably *social* media. It could be the *music* you listen to. Believe or not, most music has a *message* to it. The lyrics you listen to all operate out of certain worldviews and assumptions about life, relationships, sex, time, money, reality—among other things. Maybe it’s *music* for you. Or maybe for you, it’s something more like books, audiobooks, or podcasts—whether that’s fiction or nonfiction. So I don’t know what the most regular, *frequent* interaction with media is for you personally, but chances are all of us have one, two, three of those forms of media

that we gravitate towards most often. If you *don't* already know what it is, you might want to check the Screen Time feature on your phone—I'm sure it'll be glad to show you.

And listen: because our habits *change* us—for the good and the bad—there's a pretty good chance that whatever the most frequent one is for you, it is *also* one of the main things *forming* and *conforming* you, over time, to the value system of the world. There's no way to read, watch, and listen to Barstool Sports ten hours a week and not be *formed* over time to think and operate a certain way as a result. To *value* certain things as a result. There's no way to spend three hours on TikTok a day and not be formed to think a certain way about the world. There's no way to listen to break-up songs on repeat all day everyday and not think a certain way about *relationships*. Are you following? The media you consume *absolutely* can and will conform you to a certain way of thinking and acting and believing and living. If you don't think that it will, think again.

So our pitch to you, if you really struggle with resisting the *world*, is to spend the next month or so simply *abstaining* from whatever form of *media* you interact with the most. For thirty days, simply omit that media contact from your life. Set an app restriction on your phone, or delete the app *off* your phone, ask for accountability from someone in your LifeGroup, or whatever particular strategy you want to employ. Temporarily *cut off* the access that that outlet gets to your mind and heart and imagination. It's that simple.

And then, if you *really* want to maximize this practice, *replace* the time you would've spent *there*, on something that forms your mind and heart in the direction of the gospel. Fill it up with time in the Scriptures, a podcast all about following Jesus, or face-to-face time with people in your LifeGroup who encourage you towards Jesus. And then see if, after thirty days, your heart doesn't look and feel a bit different as a result. I'd be willing to bet it does. Make sense?

Okay. So with that plan in place: for the rest of this morning, we're going to open the communion tables. There, followers of Jesus will come remember the body and blood of Jesus shed on the cross, and sing and celebrate him overcoming the world for us together. Which as always, is where the desire and the willingness to change and transform comes from. Let's pray.