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WHY BE WELL-ADJUSTED WHEN YOU CAN BE SAVAGE?

Being well-adjusted is seriously overrated.

I’m tired of knowing my place and toeing the party line.

Webster’s dictionary defines misfit as “a person who is poorly adapted to a situation or environment.”

Like it’s a bad thing?

I think there is a lot to be said for the poorly adapted.

When you are trying to adapt to a culture that finds everything pretty much meaningless—who wants to adapt to that?

When you are trying to adapt to a culture that specializes in filters and computer tricks that make you look thinner and more gorgeous than you really are, and online posts that try to impress people rather than impact people—who wants to adapt to that?

When you are trying to adapt to a culture that is all about fulfilling the
boring, conformist values of the “American Dream”—who wants to adapt to that?

And frankly, I’m not interested in trying to fit in with unthinking Christianity, made up of followers of an unquestioning vanilla-flavored brand of Churchianity, with all its tameness and sameness. Especially since the One who started it all was offering something more along the lines of a banana split with gummy bears and sprinkles on it.

So, when I am offered the opportunity to adapt to the System—in whatever form—then I will just politely decline.

Or maybe not so politely.

I'm proud to be a misfit.

Who really needs to “fit in” anyway? Sometimes it feels like we are moving ever closer to the world George Orwell envisioned in 1984. A world where everyone is expected to conform, to take their proper place as a cog in the System, to just keep quiet and not upset the applecart, to do what is expected and unquestioningly adapt, and to meekly submit to the subtle brainwashing that lulls us into complacency.

No. Just no.

I’m too busy nourishing my inner rebel, trying to keep alive to the things that really matter.

I’m saying no to being what the mighty J.D. Salinger’s young Holden Caulfield called “a phony.”

I refuse to believe that everybody’s Instagram posts are telling it like it is. It is easy to slip into a comparison of our real life behind the scenes
with the highlight reels that everyone else is posting. And then we begin to feel like our life is kind of boring in comparison.

It used to be that we tried to live up to the models we saw in magazines. Now we try to live up to our own Facebook profile.

So…if your life seems boring in comparison with other people’s lives, maybe that means that it is time to change your life. Instead of focusing on a desperate attempt to get the attention of others, maybe it is time to just quit worrying about what other people think and decide to live your own adventure.

That’s what I’m trying to do.

No one ever accused me of being well-adjusted.

And I’m proud of that. I’m happy to be a misfit.

When I was a teenager I told my family and friends about some of the dreams I had for my life. Big dreams. Huge, hulking dreams.

I dreamed about having a show on TV and radio stations around the world. I imagined doing talk shows and radio interviews. I planned on writing a book that would be in bookstores everywhere.

Not because I needed the approval of my fellow featherless bipeds. I couldn’t care less about that. But I had a vision about how God could use me to give hope to the world, especially to those who were struggling and confused and just plain tired of it all.

Maybe I was a little like Joseph, who couldn’t keep his mouth shut about his coat of many colors. I was seventeen when I really began to grasp my dream, and I started telling people about it. They quickly let
me know what they thought about all my dreaming. They told me to quit fantasizing and get serious. Some offered stern rebukes about recognizing my place. Or, more often, I just got a blank look from people who didn’t know what to say, like the person who is dancing with you at a party but clearly wishes they were dancing with someone else. A few just smiled and humored me.

My dreams didn’t fit with living an ordinary life.

Some tried to tell me that becoming a friendly neighborhood pastor would be the best way to accomplish what I dreamed about. But I knew that wasn’t the answer. I couldn’t see myself sitting in an air-conditioned office, answering emails and talking to parishioners whose main concern was that the music was too loud on Sunday.

That might be all right for some people, but it wasn’t the dream God had given me. I tried that approach for a while, but it left me stressed and unhappy and unfulfilled.

So, I took ahold of my dream, believed in it, and did all the hard work I needed to do to make it come true. I worked hard. I sweated to the point of exhaustion. I ground it out. I failed, learned something from the failure, failed again, and then learned some more.

It was bitter before it was sweet.

And guess what? My dreams have come true, and what’s more, I feel like I’m only at the beginning of the journey.

Because I didn’t want to say yes to the well-adjusted and the average when I could be maladjusted and a savage!

I’m sure you have your own dreams. They probably look a lot different than mine. Which is good. It is in our uniqueness that we can make the most impact for God and others.
When you have the courage to pursue your own dream you are probably going to look like a misfit to the people around you.

But really, who cares?

Say no to conformity and expectations and ordinary-ness.

Nourish your inner rebel.

To do that you’ll need some encouragement nourishment, and that’s one of the things this book is all about.

When Henry Ford was first introduced to the famous inventor, Thomas Edison, it was as “the man trying to build a car that runs on gasoline.” Upon hearing those words, Edison’s face lit up and he slammed down his fist in excitement. “You’ve got it. A car that has its own power plant; that’s a brilliant idea.”

Up to that point, Ford had mostly met with ridicule and naysaying whenever he talked about his project. He’d come very close to giving up. But Edison’s words ignited a new burst of confidence and became an important turning point in Ford’s life.

“I thought I had a good idea, but I started to doubt myself,” Ford once said. “Then came along one of the greatest minds that’s ever lived and gave me his complete approval.” This simple vote of confidence helped launch the automotive industry.

I hope this book is a vote of confidence for your dreams, so that when it comes to visioneering your future, you’ll give everything…but up!
Sometimes it isn’t easy to be a misfit.

If there were a Misfit Hall of Fame, then it would probably include such famous ones as Charlie Brown or Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. They were misfits who found their way despite everything that stood in their path.

For these misfits there is a certain kind of innocence and childlikeness that is both their strength…and their weakness.

They eventually triumph, but not before they miss kicking a few footballs and end up flat on their back, or detour to the land of misfit toys on their way to the North Pole.

You gotta love them.

Even if you don’t want to be them.

But there is another kind of misfit—more antiestablishment and rebellious.
When you tell them to stay in their lane, to color within the lines, to toe the party line, or to do as they’ve been told—well, that just isn’t happening.

They are the resistance.

They stand against the System.

Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, the Beat Poets, Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games*, and Jonas from *The Giver*. Real or fictional, these are people who refuse to bow to a System that is slowly killing people from the inside out.

Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and G.K. Chesterton were also misfits, rebels against a cold and boring world, and against a cold and boring form of Christianity.

Why fit in?

All of these people—real and imaginary—are people who marched to the beat of a different drummer.

And if you listen carefully, maybe you can hear the rhythm of rebelliousness too.

Let me tell you a story about a young preacher named Vincent.

He was an idealistic man of profound faith who wanted to serve others and share the gospel with them. He had been an art dealer but became disenchanted with that enterprise, so he decided to take a position as a missionary among the miners in a small Belgian mining town. A student of the New Testament, Vincent took its commands literally and
chose to live a simple life, sharing the impoverished conditions of his small congregation. He shunned wealth and prestige.

He gave away most of his possessions and even became homeless for a time, sometimes sleeping in a haystack behind the home of the town baker.

Can you picture this in your mind’s eye? Vincent would get up to preach before the congregation with bits of hay sticking to his clothes and the smell of bread wafting off him. The people loved him for his simple kindness and the passion with which he shared the gospel of Christ.

Vincent was committed to living like Jesus.

But the authorities of the missionary organization decided to pull their financial support from him. They thought it was unseemly for a preacher to live in the same kind of poverty as the people to whom he ministered. And his passionate faith embarrased their dignified religiosity. Though he no longer had their support, Vincent tried to stay and serve his little flock, but his health soon began to fail.

And he felt like a failure.

In his spare time Vincent had begun to draw and paint, so now he decided to pursue a different dream—that of being an artist.

This disenfranchised, misfit, failure of a preacher became one of the most famous artists of modern times—Vincent van Gogh.

When, later in life, he painted his great masterpiece, “The Starry Night,” Vincent envisioned a brilliant swirling night sky full of luminous stars above a small village filled with houses lit up against the darkness. But one of the buildings in the painting remained dark. There was no light coming from the church.
The church he had served faithfully had become a closed door for him.

If you, like me and like Vincent, have felt that religion has failed you, remember that you are not alone. The same thing happened to Jesus. The religious authorities of His day colluded with the Roman Empire to kill the young, idealistic Jew.

When you feel like your plans and passions have led to a dead end, remember that God has something bigger in store for you. The young missionary who preached to a tiny congregation became a painter whose artistry gave billions a glimpse of God's glory.

If your plans don't work out, maybe it’s just because God has better ones for you.

If you can’t see your way in the dark night of life, perhaps you need to look up at the swirling, shimmering stars and embrace God's hope.

If you are a misfit you'll probably have to do battle with the temptation to become deeply pessimistic.

When you are different from the rest of the world, you see through its shallowness and falsity and fakery and phoniness. And pretty soon you might start to think that everything is shallow and false and fake and phony.

That can make you start to get cynical and skeptical and negative.

Note: There is a lot to be said for being realistic and asking good questions. I’m not asking anyone to become a simple-minded Pollyanna. Asking the right questions can save us from swallowing a pack of lies and deceptions.
But…

The danger of cynicism and skepticism is that they can make you a Grumpy Gus. They can stifle your sense of The Possible. They can turn you into a smug curmudgeon who stares out at the world from an ivory tower and judges everyone else to be ignorant, and therefore only worth ignoring.

And, honestly, it just takes a lot of the fun out of living.

When that happens, it is just another way that the System wins.

The only way to do battle with a debilitating pessimism is to embrace a fanatical optimism.

When you can be absurdly optimistic in the face of all the things that seem to be arrayed against you, you take away all their power to control your emotions, your decisions, and your sense of happiness.

When you see all the falseness of the world your vision no longer is opaque. You can see through it to a deeper and more satisfying dream-ality. You can get a perspective that isn’t limited by this world, but sees a bigger picture.

In the face of everything that might try to bring us down, we can be optimists. Not people who approach life with an empty, plastic smile, but who make a choice to be happy in the face of life’s pain. We can turn situations that are painful into painfuel, driving us onward to our destiny. We don’t react to hardship, we respond to hardship. We are possessed of a kind of cheerful stoicism with a strength that moves heaven and earth.

That’s how my friends and I are approaching life.

We embrace extremism. After all, there’s no such thing as a moderate
revolutionary. And Jesus didn’t die to make us safe. He died to make us dangerous.

We are optimists.

We are misfits.

We are Optimisfits.