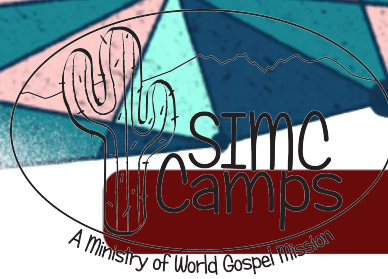


ENCOUNTERS

August 2023

HOW GOD'S STORY CONNECTS WITH OUR EVERYDAY LIVES



CULTURE

PETER SPEAKS UP

Answer the questions and return to SIMCamps | 14202 N 73rd Ave. | Peoria, AZ 85381. Please print legibly.

First and Last Name: _____

Age: _____

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OVERVIEW

Christ-followers often forget the main goal of God's Kingdom: to grow and glorify God. When talking about the collision of faith and culture, though, it's easy to replace that goal with either a desire to make Christians seem cool or win arguments in a culture war.

QUESTION

- When you get spooked, are you a "fight" or "flight" kind of person?

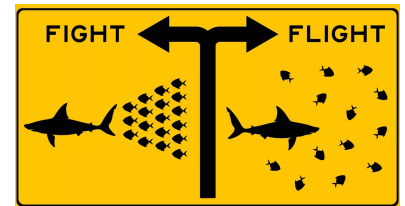
WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT

Standing against culture is scary. Defending friends from bullying, voicing an unpopular opinion, or telling others that you believe in God strikes fear in everyone at some point. However, when fear controls our encounters with culture, it makes us react in one of two ways: fight or flight.

For example, look at Peter's life. On the night Jesus was arrested, Peter talked a big game and boldly declared his resolution to never deny Jesus. But when soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew a sword, sliced off a soldier's ear, and then sprinted off into the darkness to hide. His fear drove him to fight and flee at the first sight of conflict, creating a bloody mess for Jesus to clean up (which he did by healing the soldier). Later that night, when confronted by those who recognized him as a disciple, he denied knowing Jesus three separate times. His fear had driven him to flee again, running away from any association with Jesus.

You've probably seen fight or flight reactions in your own life as well. Clashing with culture can lead to some ugly fights; it often seems like people care more about making the other side's opinion look stupid than thoughtfully seeking to find the truth. It's just as common to want to turn and run at any sign of potential conflict.

Thankfully for us and for Peter, that's not the end of his story. In the passage below, we see a different Peter. Instead of being driven by fear, he's driven by God's mission to spread the Gospel. He doesn't flee from an opportunity to speak, and he doesn't try to win any fight for God. He just tells the truth: Jesus has come to redeem the world.



Acts 2:32–41

³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand

³⁵ until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.”

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

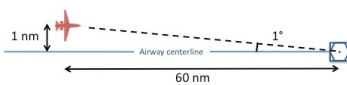
³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Aligning our Motives

When pilots navigate by themselves in a small plane, they commonly use a method called the “one in sixty rule.” This rule states that for every degree off-course a pilot is at the beginning of the journey, he or she will be a mile off-course after traveling 60 miles.



Let’s put it this way: You’re flying from San Francisco to Washington D.C., but you head out misaligned just one degree to the left. A few hours later, you’d end up in Baltimore by mistake, 40 miles north of D.C. Hope you’ve got enough gas left to hit your target!

The longer the trip, the bigger the difference a misalignment makes. If you wanted to go to the moon, a one-degree mistake would send you 4,169 miles wide and hurtling into space. And if you wanted to check out the sun, you’d miss by over 1.6 million miles.

Little misalignments can make a big difference. When we engage with culture, we need to check our motives: are they where they should be? If we are afraid of a little conflict, we may never stand up for truth. If we approach people with nothing more than a desire to win arguments, we’ll just alienate them from God and other Christ-followers. We can’t forget to align our motives with the original purpose of God’s Kingdom. God doesn’t tell us to merely clash with culture; he wants us to tell people about him and his desire to save the lost.

Questions:

- From your experience, what is popular culture’s opinion of Christ-followers? Why?
- When sharing Christ with the world, what would be the end result if you’re main goal is to:
 - Never ruffle any feathers?
 - Always win every argument?
- What small adjustments do you need to make stay properly aligned with God’s mission as you experience the conflict between faith and culture?

If you have time and would like to read the story of Peter's restoration, read John 21. Pay attention to the how Jesus pursues Peter and reminds him that his past failings do not matter. The only thing that does matter is the wonderful calling and identity that Jesus freely gives to him.

Beyond Fight or Flight

A fight-or-flight response (also known as hyperarousal or the acute stress response) was first described by Walter Bradford Cannon. His theory was that animals react in a specific, physiological manner to any perceived threat to survival, attack, or harmful event. Through years of research, scientists have found that these fight-or-flight responses are generated by a signal chain in the brain that is designed to boost energy and heighten awareness. It's common to see an acceleration in heart and breathing rates, dilation of muscular blood vessels, tunnel vision, and many other responses as the body prepares to defend itself.

This fight or flight response is well-engrained. Honestly, it's not going away. So, if we want to change the way that we engage with culture, we have to go all the way to the root and take our fear or desire to fight out of the equation. Going beyond fight or flight is easier said than done, but God is patient with his people, and he equips us with the Gospel and the Holy Spirit to accomplish what we cannot do on our own.

Questions:

- When approaching your differences with culture, are you more likely to avoid conflict or fight to make sure everyone knows you're right?
- For those who'd rather not rock the boat—how does God's love for the world inspire you to be bolder in your confrontations with culture?
- For those who just love to win fights—how does God's love for the world inspire you to change how you confront culture?
- What people or situations in your daily life might be opportunities for you to boldly share God's truth in a loving way?



APPLICATION

DISCOVER

- Why do you think God wants us to talk with people who don't believe in him?

THE BIBLE IN YOUR LIFE

On Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised arrived and filled the hearts of his followers, the Jews in Jerusalem were confused by what they saw and assumed these Christ-followers were drunk. Peter could have stayed quiet and said nothing. He could have been insulted and responded with a fight. Instead, he used the opportunity to speak up and tell the truth about Jesus, sharing God's good news and inviting the Jews to believe. As a result, thousands put their faith in Christ that day.



Read Acts 2:32–41 above, then answer the following questions.

Questions:

- When Peter spoke up, what did he talk about?
- What do you think was the purpose or motivation of Peter's message?
- How did the crowd respond to what he said?
- How do you think God wants us to think of people who don't know him yet?

APPLY IT

All of us approach a culture clash with some level of fear. Are you more tempted to want to win a fight or to avoid conflict altogether? What steps can you take to course-correct and be more motivated by a desire to see people know God?

A QUOTE TO THINK ABOUT

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." – Martin Luther King Jr.

THE TAKEAWAY

Our goal when engaging with the world is to boldly share God's truth and love in order to build God's Kingdom.