

8 Traits of Biblical Outliers

In this article, I use the word “outlier” to describe an exceptional person who operates largely outside of the norms of mainstream to change the world. Notable biblical heroes such as John the Baptist, Jesus, Micaiah, Elijah, the Apostle Paul and our Lord Jesus Christ, were all outliers since they did not conform nor function within the institutional religious frameworks of their day.

For example, before Scripture mentions the word of the Lord coming to John the Baptist, it gives a litany of all the so called great and influential men alive during his time that God bypassed to speak through John in the wilderness (Luke 3:1, 2). When Jesus taught, the religious leaders were shocked by His knowledge because He was not formally instructed through their institutional systems (John 7:15). The prophet Micaiah risked his life and well-being when he refused to speak in sync with the majority of the Jewish prophets who were declaring victory for King Ahab (1 Kin. 22). Certainly, Elijah usually stood alone before God and was active in confronting wicked queen Jezebel while 7,000 prophets were hiding in caves (1 Kings 19). Even though the apostle Paul was not one of the original 12 apostles, he wrote most of the New Testament and was chosen by God to bring the gospel to the Gentile world.

In church history, perfect examples of religious outliers are Martin Luther and John Calvin who bucked Roman Catholicism and launched the protestant Reformation; 18th-century evangelists George Whitfield and John Wesley held enormous crusades in open fields because they were shut out of the Anglican churches; 19th-century evangelist Charles Finney resisted hyper-Calvinism and brought the Second Great Awakening by establishing new measures in evangelism; later on in this century, healing evangelist Alexander Dowie not only taught but founded the city of Zion, Illinois; 20th-century pastor

William Seymour used a shoebox as his pulpit and launched the Azusa Street revival that brought Pentecostalism to the globe; and finally, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used his amazing oration, strategic wisdom, convening ability and brand of non-violent civil disobedience to launch the Civil Rights movement of the 20th century.

Why does God sometimes use outliers? Does He need to use them today? (Some would argue today that president Donald Trump is an outlier in regard to the political establishment.) I believe yes, God has to use outliers at times when mainstream culture (religious, political or otherwise) is so corrupt that God chooses to operate outside the norm to perform His purpose.

The following are eight traits of biblical outliers:

1. Outliers are resolute.

Every one of the outliers mentioned above was committed to the point of death to his cause. Isaiah prophesied about one of the traits of the coming Messiah when he said that He (the Messiah) would set His face like flint and give His back to those who would smite Him and not hide his face from shame and spitting (see Is. 50:6-7).

2. Outliers are creative.

Outliers usually get bored with conformity to the norm, they think outside the box and look for unique ways to accomplish their mission.

3. Outliers take the road less traveled.

While most people in the world look for safe, secure and predictable pathways, outliers enjoy pioneering new trails for others to follow.

4. Outliers are prophetic.

Outliers have an acute prophetic sense regarding their mission and how it fits in with contemporary society. They are the ones who intuit a trend before it happens and create new paradigms to be at the tip of the spear of new realities. These are the ones who see things before most people notice them. While most are just discovering the truth of a matter, the outlier is already implementing possible solutions to the challenges this new discovery may bring.

5-Outliers understand the true needs of the day.

While most people accommodate themselves to and embrace the *a priori* conclusions of mainstream culture, outliers dig underneath the surface until they discover the root issues responsible for cultural maladies. Outliers then use their creative ability to transform problems into possibilities that burst forth into new avenues of opportunity.

6. Outliers are prepared for their time.

Most people are short on preparation and long on activity. Outliers like John the Baptist prepared themselves 30 years for a six-month ministry while Jesus prepared 30 years for a three-and-a-half-year ministry. Outliers practice and hone their skills so that when their moment comes they are more than ready.

7. Outliers risk all for truth.

All the biblical and historical outliers mentioned above had one thing in common: They were ready to die for their faith and mission. They did not live a life built upon convenience but crafted a life built around their purpose. The worst thing that can happen to an outlier is not physical death but missing their purpose.

8. Outliers fear God more than men.

Biblical outliers do not live for the accolades of others.

They love and fear God more than men. During Jesus' day, many of the rulers of the Jews believed in Him but did not confess Him publicly because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42, 43).

I have met many prospective leaders in my time, but many of them have made the wrong choices and limited their potential in life because they were afraid of being out of the mainstream. Outliers are voices, not echoes. They shun cultural groupthink, stand on biblical verities and declare scriptural truth.

We are living in a day in which many in the evangelical church have acquiesced to popular culture, even to the point of agreeing with laws and policies that are unbiblical. Many in the church have taken the safe road and act like the prophets of Micaiah's day (1 Kin. 22), only declaring things they know will give them the approval of pop culture and the political establishment.

May God nurture prophetic outliers who are willing to pay the price, stand against compromise and use their unique calling to advance His kingdom. {eoa}