

THE NORMAL FAMILY HAS A SON NAMED AB

J.J. Turner, Ph.D.

The Normal family had three children, all of which were considered intelligent, well behaved, and compliant to the rules. Then things changed in the family dynamics with the birth of their fourth child, a boy whose name was Ab. Right from the moment of birth, Ab demonstrated that he was going to be different from his three siblings. His temperament, intelligence, and behavior was different; thus the name Ab was appropriate. When Ab was enrolled in preschool the parents took all the psychological tests and gave them to the teacher. They told the teacher Ab was smart but different. The teacher made a big deal out of Ab-Normal.

Have you ever noticed the prolific use of the words *normal* and *abnormal*? These two words can determine a person's successes or failures in life. There is a humanistic group of professionals, most identified in the field of psychology, that specialize in assigning people to one of the categories: normal or abnormal. There is a holy horror of being place in the abnormal category. It wrecks your future and creates ongoing anxiety.

You don't have to look very far, or have your ears especially tuned, to read and hear the frequent use of the word NORMAL in our daily lives. What is normal?

1. *What is normal blood pressure?*
2. *What is normal body temperature?*
3. *What is normal IQ?*
4. *What is normal cholesterol*
5. *What is normal blood count?*
6. *What is normal eye pressure?*
7. *What is normal behavior?*
8. *What is normal blood sugar?*

And the list goes on and on. What is normal? What I do is normal, what you do is abnormal.

What is Normal?

Webster's generic definition of *Normal (adj.)*, is: **1** "Conforming with or constituting an accepted standard, model or pattern, esp. corresponding to the median or average for a large group in type, appearance, achievement, function, development, etc." Abnormal is defined as

“not normal; not average; not typical; not usual; irregular, etc.; based of what the majority deem to be the norm.”

In psychology, psychiatry, and mental health, *NORMAL* denotes a developmentally appropriate level of effective functioning of personality, cognition, and affect that is satisfactory both to people and their respective social milieu” (www.medical-dictionary.com/normal).

NORMALITY (also known as normalcy) is the state of being “normal”, as opposed to being deviant, eccentric or unusual. Behavior can be normal for an individual (intrapersonal normality) when it is consistent with the most common behavior for that person. Normal is also used to describe individual behavior that conforms to the most common behavior in society (known as conformity) ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normality_\(behavior\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normality_(behavior))).

Psychology and Normal

The American Psychiatric Association, in my opinion, has hijacked the words normal, abnormal, and normality. In their “bible”—the DSM—they have developed hundreds of ways to determine if a person’s behavior, etc. is normal or abnormal. Diagnosis are made and drugs are prescribed. In this world labels are all important. These labels only add to the anxiety already in existence. Billion dollar business are built on the use of “normal” and “abnormal”, and on what constitutes wellness, unhealthy, and disorders. Notice the drug advertisements on TV.

What is Abnormal Psychology? Simply defined it is the study of “abnormal thoughts, feelings, and behavior.” There are two basic theories about what causes abnormal behavior:

- 1. Somatogenic Theory: Abnormality is caused by a biological disorder or disease. It may result from a brain injury or mental disease. Medication or surgery may be used to relieve or “cure.”*
- 2. Psychogenic Theory: Abnormality stems from psychological problems such as “hearing voices”, negative thinking, fear, obsessive thought patterns etc. Therapy includes talk therapy, cognitive behavior changes, self-talk, etc.*

I was taught in graduate school that abnormality is related to four major things:

- 1. Distress: something occurs that causes anxiety, fear, loss, anger, etc.*
- 2. Deviance: this is departing from societal behavior norms: “Peeping Tom”, “Flasher”, etc.*
- 3. Dysfunction: not able to perform normal or regular things; depression, recluse, etc.*

4. Danger: reckless behavior, taking chances, suicide ideation, etc.

One of these or all four together may produce abnormal behavior. The behavior may be temporal or it may be perpetual.

Contributors to determining what is Normal

In a practical or pragmatic sense, normal is like beauty—it is in the eye of the beholder (Or the therapist). This is moving beyond the medical and legal fields. Thus the question, which is valid, who determines what behavior or personality is normal?

1. How about cultural contributors? In some African tribes the women go without clothing on their bosoms. They have facial tattoos. A person may have grown up in a home where soup was “sucked making a noise” from the bowl or spoon. In some cultures the family and extended family members live in the same household. Visiting a foreign country you observe customs that you deem “not normal.” Why? You are judging based on USA norms. Not to debate the right or wrong, it is simply true that culture plays a major role in determining what is normal and what is abnormal.
2. How about the difference in times? When I was a boy numerous Blue Laws were in effect. Businesses didn’t open on Sunday. When it was learned that a Jewish merchant had opened his store on Sunday, he was going against the norm. The times document culture. Some of the bygone habits, beliefs, and customs are still being used today to judge what is normal and what is abnormal. Some tend to rebel against “old school” norms
3. How about the “isolation” of some religions and churches. A congregation is a small cultural bubble in a larger bubble called society. Churches have creeds, traditions, doctrines, habits, programs, etc. which they expect members to support and engage in. Some of these are based on Bible doctrines and some on traditions; usually both are equally bound as the norm. What is accepted in one church is rejected in another.
4. There are the things we grew up with in our homes that were considered normal? It may have been choosing to eat certain food, certain ways. It may have been an acceptance or rejection of an ethnic group not our own. It may have been passing

judgment on entertainment, etc. Family life plays a major role in determining what is normal or abnormal. The people next door are abnormal because they listen to opera.

Yes, there are numerous things that go into determining what is normal. There are the psychological norms, the community norms, the religious norms, the domestic norms, personal norms and it goes on and on. What is normal? What is abnormal? How do we know for sure?

Choosing a New Normal

You and every person on planet earth, including myself, is in a shared “normal condition.” According to the Bible it is “normal” to be a sinner. Shocking? Not really if we let the Bible speak. The apostle Paul declared this, *“There is none righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10). “[F]or all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).* But it gets worse, *“And you he made alive, who were DEAD in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked...” (Ephesians 2:1, 2).* Within the “normal” state of sinners there is major chaos, hate, crime, drunkenness, etc.

While, sooner or later, it is “normal for a person to sin”, this normal creates an amazing abnormal condition. It is abnormal for a child to be separated from a parent. Yet that is what happens when a person sins: they are separated from God the Father: *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1, 2).* It creates a spiritual “Amber Alert.”

As Christians when we heard the Gospel—the Good News—about how we could choose a new normal, we repented (Acts 2:38) and chose to do so. The new normal became a reality when we were baptized into Christ: *“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4; Read all of Chapter 6).* We became “new creations.”

Choosing the new normal, as defined by God, we are now practicing these new attitudes and behaviors:

1. *“Have this attitude in you which was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:4-7).*

2. *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).*
3. *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2).*
4. *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).*
5. *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from sin” (1 John 1:7).*
6. *“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 4:7).*
7. *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:1, 2).*

When you move from the “normal of the sinful world” to the new “normal in Christ” you will be looked upon as abnormal. Here is how your former associates, with whom you had a sinful lifestyle viewed as normal, will now view you as abnormal: *“In regard to these, they think it STRANGE that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:4).*

Oh by the way, the Normal family changed Ab’s name to Norm. And he is doing honor to it.

I pray you are rejoicing in the new normal which is in Christ (cf. Galatians 3:27; Romans 8:1).