

Why You Should Stop Trying to Fit In

Hello, and welcome to the Walk Humble podcast. I'm your host, Brandon Cox, and this is an ongoing conversation about life, faith, and relationships among people who don't claim to have life all figured out.

We walk, implying we want to grow and make forward progress and be healthy, holy, and happy. But we walk **humble**, meaning we get to drop the pretense take off the mask and realize that we have nothing left to prove.

Today, I want to talk to you about why you should stop trying to fit in. This is definitely one of those that I have to talk to myself about. So this is not me, the accomplished expert sharing with everyone else how I can finally stop trying to fit in. Instead, this is me as a fellow struggler walking humble, talking about why you and I together should stop trying to fit into the world, the community, the workplace, the church, the crowd in which we do life.

And this episode is inspired by a car rider line conversation with my seventh grader who is deep and wise beyond his years already. I was sharing with him a story.

Before the summer of my seventh grade year, which would have been somewhere around 1989, I mowed lawns, and I did shores and I saved up money so I could purchase a jacket for the fall. Not not just any jacket, a Polo jacket. Polo as in the brand designed by Ralph Lauren!

It had to be Polo. I spent, back in 1989, \$155 on that jacket. It couldn't be any other brand. It couldn't be off-brand. It had to be that one because if you had a jacket with the Polo logo on the chest, with that little polo player riding on a horse, you were far more likely to be thought of as rich and cool and popular. It's just the way things were.

There were other brands that were acceptable, but Polo was at the top of the list. If you had a polo shirt, polo jacket, polo whatever, you'd fit in.

On the other hand, if you wore an off-brand jacket with no logo at all, you just blended. You didn't fit in. You just weren't noticed at all.

Or even worse, if you had a jacket that had a little polo player on a horse on the chest, but it was designed by that competing company and it was obviously **not** the Polo logo, then you'd be talked about and made fun of. You'd be called a "poser". *Look at him trying to fake his way into being thought of as rich and cool and popular. Whatever else.*

Now, thankfully, you know, after getting out of the seventh grade, we all kind of grew up past that stuff. And we don't wrestle with those problems anymore, right? We don't have those tendencies, they're all gone. ???

I don't know about you. But for me, I have vacillated back and forth in this kind of mentality all my life. But I want to talk to us today, not for me as the accomplished expert who's figured it all out telling you how to stop doing this. But me as one who continues to try to figure this out, sharing with all of us why we can stop trying to fit in.

I did share with my son what made the difference for me somewhere in the middle of my high school years. I didn't do this perfectly. It wasn't once and for all. But at some point, I stopped caring so much about fitting in with a particular crowd and I started trying to figure out where I belonged. Okay, and there's a big difference between those two concepts.

There's **fitting in**, and there's **belonging**. And so my challenge today is to stop trying to fit in and start belonging.

Brene Brown talks about this in her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, and then other books and talks as well. And here's what she says about the difference between fitting in and belonging. She says,

"Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are, it requires us to be who we are."

Okay, let me read that again. "Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging on the other hand doesn't require us to change who we are. It requires us to be who we are." And Brene goes on to say

it's not just being who you are, but it's it's accepting who you are, it's belonging with yourself.

Now, what I've noticed in two and a half decades of adulthood is I still struggle between these two ideas. There are so many times when I still try to fit in, especially walking into some kind of group environment, workshop, a church service, whatever it is. We're all kind of assessing, *how can I not stand out like a sore thumb or look funny or look odd?*

We just want to fit in. We want to blend the best we can and we want to be well thought of. That's natural to a degree. But here's the problem: **Trying to fit in will always create stress in your life. But creating a life in which you truly belong, that will always lead you to peace and freedom.** Trying to fit in will always create stress. Creating a life in which you truly belong, will lead you to freedom.

Let me help you see what this looks like. How do I know if I'm trying to fit in? What does that look like? And I think we do these things a lot right? Here, just four or five ways that I think we do this on a regular basis where we try to fit in.

We might offer fake expertise in whatever topic is popular among a particular crowd. We go to a Superbowl party, and we never watched football, but suddenly we're trying to talk the talk. We're trying to sound like armchair quarterbacks, right?

We're with some people who are really into news and politics. And maybe we haven't read the news and seven weeks, but we suddenly try to sound very informed, we try to sound very intelligent about current events.

Another way is we plug into a church and we try to dress like everybody else, or cover up our bad habits. We even will adopt certain theological positions, not because we route them in some kind of biblical evidence necessarily, but because that's what these people believe. And this is where I, I think I want to fit in at and so yeah, I'll bend what I believe to kind of fit so I fit in, and we try to look holy, right, we try not to look unholy try to look the part.

I think another way we do this is we, we feel like we're part of a particular political voting bloc. So we adopt all or most of the values and talking points of that group. In other words, you might say, Well, I'm a proud conservative, and here are, you

know, on these 12 major issues, here are all of my viewpoints. And somehow they all align with that conservative leaning crowd. Or you might say, I'm a proud liberal. And all of my viewpoints and talking points seem to align with all of the major talking heads in that particular crowd, okay. So we change and adopt certain viewpoints and values to fit in.

We also try to get people to associate us with certain well known leaders and thinkers. So we named drop, we, you know, whatever field we work in, we try to, we try to sort of align ourselves with certain movers and shakers within that field by dropping certain names that at the appropriate time, so people associate us correctly.

And another way we try to do this is sort of the opposite of that. We will distance ourselves from other personalities. And we'll issue disclaimers about how we definitely don't agree with everything they have to say, Okay, we we distance ourselves, we say, Hey, here's a piece of wisdom from this guy that I read once, but I want you to know, I don't agree with most of what he says. And we issue these disclaimers to make sure that our image is protected we try to fit in.

Belonging on the other hand looks very different. Belonging means I don't have to change who I am. I just belong here. I'm accepted for who I am. And in order to belong, there are several things that we need to do and I want to if you got a pen, write these down, if not just try to try to remember them.

Belonging requires that you begin with knowing who you are. That is knowing your personality type. Knowing what you really love what you're passionate about what bothers you, what breaks your heart, what makes you mad, what makes you sad? Knowing what floats your boat, what it is that interests you and intrigues you? What it is that energizes you or deflates you, it's knowing those things and being okay with them. It's knowing who you are. It's also and this is where we take it a step further.

It's not just knowing who you are. It's not just having an assessment about who you are. It's accepting and even celebrating you, for who you are. Did you hear that? Accepting and celebrating you for who you are?

You can belong with yourself. Now, by the way, this assumes you're not a complete jerk. In other words, accepting who you are doesn't mean overlooking all of your faults and defects and negative tendencies and sinful habits. It doesn't mean just kind of overlooking all that and go, Hey, I just am who I am. I may be rude and everyone hates me, but they just need to accept me. That's not what I'm talking about.

Growing and moving forward and becoming better is part of continuing to become the true **you** that you and others can gladly accept and celebrate. So we're not talking about being a complete jerk. But assuming you're not a complete jerk, it's accepting and celebrating you for all of your rich uniqueness for how you color the world differently than anyone else does.

And thirdly, it also means that while you will try to love everybody, you will listen to the voices of those who respect you for who you are.

That is, you're going to trust and listen to and take advice from and share life, do life with people with whom you feel you truly belong, not with people you're trying to fit in with, okay?

We're all supposed to love all of our neighbors, but we get to make choices about who we hang out with, and about who our inner circle is. And we get to choose people that are going to accept and affirm us without requiring us to conform to their image of who we ought to be.

Now, this is the part where you get to establish proper boundaries with people, you cannot just kick everybody out of your life. That's not always appropriate. Okay? But what you can do to say, I love you, I'll help you, I'll do anything for you, I can, but I cannot allow you to set the agenda for who I am becoming.

It might even sound trite to say that, "God loves you and has a wonderful purpose for your life," but it's actually true. And it's a good reminder, because we live in a world where *everyone else* will always have their own purpose for your life. Everybody will have an image they expect you to fit into, right? So instead, take your cues from God who is no respecter of persons, who's made all of us acceptable and welcome in his family through Jesus, and that God who communes with you and the innermost part of who you are, where no one sees, or hears, or knows what's

going on, in that little temple inside of yourself. Take your cues from the one who does love you, and has a wonderful purpose for your life.

By the way, figuring out who you are accepting and celebrating who you are, and seeking out relationships with people who accept and affirm you for who you are, is always easier when you accept and affirm others for who they are. You'll have more friends if you choose to *be* a friend first, right? You'll find more circles in which you feel like you **belong**, even if you don't "fit in," if you're willing to let others belong in your life without conforming to your desires and expectations for them. When you accept and affirm others for who they are, you will receive more of that in return.

And here's the thing, I don't know what station in life you're at as you're listening to this. Maybe you're in college, you're in a fraternity or sorority. Maybe you're working in a corporate environment, or you're working at home and you go to church and you volunteer. Maybe you're living in a nursing home and some of your closest associates are in the rooms down the hall from you, no matter how old or experienced you may be. I think this is a lesson you'll have to learn over and over again for the rest of your life. So let me repeat it one more time.

Trying to fit in will always lead to stress. But being you and "belonging to yourself first," as Brene puts it, will lead you toward peace and freedom.

Okay, that's it. That's the episode. I'm really thankful you listened to it. I'm happy to take feedback and questions that www.walkhumble.com or just email me at brandon@walkhumble.com.

I'd be really happy and thankful if you consider sharing this episode with somebody that might need to hear it, especially maybe a young person in your life who's sort of forming their views and values as they march forward. And if you believe in this work, if you appreciate what I have to say and you want to support the podcast and all the other writing that I do, just visit www.walkhumble.com/support. Okay, you can drop a small one-time gift or become a monthly supporter. Either way, I'm just glad you're here. I want us to make progress. But I want us to do without all the pretense I hope we can walk humble. Thanks so much for listening!