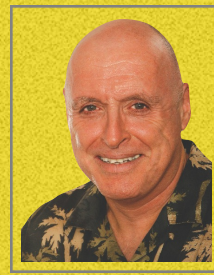


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1274 Being Different Doesn't Mean You're Flawed

Question. At any time in your life, have you felt like an outsider, like you didn't fit in, like you didn't measure up to others, maybe like life wasn't going to be special? Maybe that you were destined to live a life of struggle and quiet desperation. I'm Jerry Roberts and if you've been there or are there, today is for you on The Extra Point.

I grew up in Los Angeles and though it was a welfare existence, I had what I thought was a decent childhood — lack of money aside.

As early as the fourth grade I buried myself in sports and that was my escape from the growing reality that my circumstances were different from what other kids in my grade had.

With the exception of a couple of friends, all the rest lived in nice houses, their parents drove new cars, and when teachers had us describe our summer when classes started up in the new school year, all of them talked about family vacations.

None of that applied to me — no house, no nice car, and no vacation. There never was a vacation. So, I felt very much like an outsider. I felt different, and it wasn't a good different.

I'm sure it was during these years of feeling like I wasn't in the same class as these other kids, that I became an introvert. I've spoken about this before, and some people don't get how a guy who was on the radio for years, and who frequently speaks in public, could possibly be an introvert. I get it, but I can trace it to my junior high and high school years.

When I conducted interviews of leaders in Guam for Directions magazine, sometimes I'd ask, "What advice would you give the younger version of yourself if you could turn back the clock?" In all the times I asked the question, I never thought about how I might answer it.

I saw something yesterday that brought all of this out, and I think many people will relate.

Sir Richard's Branson, the chairman of the Virgin Group, a London-based multi-billion dollar conglomerate, was asked that same question, what advice he would give to his 10-year-old self. What he said was profound.

"Different does not mean flawed," said Branson. At age 10, he struggled with school and dyslexia. He was a restless kid and had a poor academic record.

"When your potential in life and your self-worth is dictated by exams, it's easy to feel lost and as though the world is against you," he said.

Branson became a serial entrepreneur and has a net worth in excess of \$5 billion, so he found a way to overcome his issues. Even so, his early experience of feeling out of sorts with the world gave him empathy for all those who feel different and who worry that their life will be one of struggle and loneliness.

His message to both his younger self and all those who grow up feeling like an outsider is one of understanding and encouragement.

Branson added, "If I could say something to my 10-year-old self, it would be a gentle reminder that being different does not mean you are lazy or stupid. Thinking differently makes you unique and allows for so many different ideas, innovations, and adventures to unravel. Don't be afraid to embrace the quirks. You're a weirdo, and that's your superpower."

Branson is exactly right, and science agrees. We are all weirdos. There is no one on the planet like you or me. We are totally unique in our strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, and experiences. Each of us is different.

Branson would add that our differences are also our strengths.

(Con't.)

There are kids in our families who need to know that they're ok just the way they are, even if they're different. It's the same with our coworkers. Is there anyone different or weird where you work?

A lot of people feel like outsiders. I sometimes wonder if the real reason some folks get lost inside of their phone is because that's the one place they don't feel out of place.

It's up to all of us to let people know they're okay, and have a contribution to make.

I give my gratitude to Richard Branson, for sharing his story. Grab the transcript, #1274, and pass it on.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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