



A Life Transformed Session 5 – Ordinary

Introduction

When Jesus encounters his disciples on the shore of the lake or along the road passing through the city, his words transform their daily lives from ordinary to extraordinary. His simple command to “Come, follow me,” called those first disciples to a transcendent relationship. They moved from the ordinary to the sacred with one simple decision. As they lay aside their nets, or walked away from their booths, they engaged in a season of spiritual transformation.

Jesus interposed himself upon that which was routine and common. Mending nets or collecting taxes would wait, for the Rabbi offered an opportunity to follow in his footsteps. It was an invitation that could not be refused. It was their chance to be someone special as they followed along the path, learning from the teacher. Little did they know that this teacher was offering so much more.

Our lives are much like the original disciples in one sense. Our daily tasks can become ordinary and mundane. Our work, whether in the home or at the office, can become common and lifeless, as if we were endlessly mending nets on the stern of our father’s fishing boat. When we least expect it, something or someone comes along introducing revelatory change. We are not typically called to drop everything to obediently follow an itinerate pastor through the wilderness. But we are routinely called to take up our cross and follow the Lord of our lives.

At first, this call is a heady task, mandating our undivided attention and passion. But, as the years pass, and as we become a little staid in our practice of Christian discipleship, we tend to settle for the day-to-day routine generally accepted as the norm. No matter how our moment of spiritual conversion appears in retrospect, we continue to faithfully follow Jesus Christ, even if we do so with waning passion at times. Our faith that was once so extraordinary has become common, mundane and, perhaps, ordinary.

How can we be transformed by our faith in this season of comfortable Christianity? We look for God in the everyday patterns of our lives. Our shared experience with God in the day-to-day is part of our faith journey. This study gives us an opportunity to encounter God in the ordinary. We are transformed when we see our ordinary time as the most sacred moments of encountering God.

Ordinary time becomes sacred when we create a routine that opens the door to God. Embracing those moments allows us to cross the threshold of God's throne room of grace, allowing our faith to grow exponentially into personal holiness.

Ordinary/Sacred Time

Redefining ordinary time can be a deeply personal endeavor. Our ordinary time becomes sacred when we discover God has joined us in the daily tasks we find to be common or mundane:

- *Making the kid's lunch.*
- *Commuting to work.*
- *Lunch with friends.*
- *Helping with homework assignments.*
- *Folding laundry.*

Each of these activities, when devoted wholly to God, can become a holy, sacred task.

The most profound mystery of the Christian life is not an outward revelation of spiritual truth that radically changes the world around us. No, it is an inward discovery that brings deep spirituality to life in our souls. The ordinary time in our life has a mystical, hidden meaning and purpose. Just as Elijah heard a gentle whisper after experiencing the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire (1 Kings 19:12), our encounter with God is often lived between those God-moments we experience and the inaudible voices we hear.

Daily Life as Liturgy

In his book entitled *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore explores ways we can cultivate depth and sacredness in everyday life. He writes, "There are two ways of thinking about church and religion. One is that we go to church to be in the presence of the holy, to learn and have our lives influenced by that presence. The other is that church teaches

us directly and symbolically to see the sacred dimension of everyday life."

When we cross the threshold from the ordinary to the sacred, we embrace the simple, common, daily act of living and transforming our daily habits into gestures of divine holiness. Our personal habits and daily practices become structured rituals in a day long symphony of worship to God. The ebb and flow of this sacred time can be measured in heartbeats, always in perfect rhythm with our life breath.

Our daily habits have the same impact as the liturgy of the church. They give us structure and help us understand the order of the events yet to come. We might think our liturgical practice is reserved for Sunday morning worship services. But our daily liturgy happens each and every day as we move from moment to moment, experiencing the ebb and flow of life itself. Shane Claiborne writes, "Liturgy is soul food. It nourishes our souls just as breakfast strengthens our bodies. It's sort of like family dinner. Hopefully, you get some nutritious food, but more than nutrition, family dinner is about family, love, community" (*Ordinary Radicals*).

Ordinary practices have a way of becoming daily habits. The ordinary becomes more sacred with practice. Sitting beside the bed giving God thanks for a new day. Finding order and predictability in our morning routine. Two eggs and toast with a side of devotion is a good start. Beginning the daily routine with family. Work and corporate time in divine conspiracy with the creator of the universe. Commuting home to attend to first priorities.

Dinner, relaxation, rest with the kids. Bath time. Lying down again, with prayers of thanksgiving for every good thing.

The faith we convert into daily action is the same faith that converts our soul. Our daily liturgy becomes the essential actions that move us into a deeper, more meaningful relationship with Christ. It begins with what is most common to all of us. We wake up and sit at the side of our bed, looking for our glasses and our slippers. Our first thoughts, before we begin rehearsing our “to do” list, are the habits that define us.

Our everyday, ordinary life is like the frame of our spiritual house, upon which we build a life with the potential to become sacred. If we listen for the still, small voice that comes as a whisper between the noise and chaos of the world, we begin to hear and see the divine will of God. You do not need to be a saint to find God, because God has already found you. We just need to know where to look for the evidence of God in our daily routines.

Exploring the Word

Ask someone in your group to read Romans 12:1-2 MSG.

¹⁻² So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Paul tells the church at Rome, “*So, (therefore) here is what I want you to do, with God’s help.*” We take note of Paul’s imperative commands, a list of action items to follow. He is encouraging the church to be proactive in taking specific action based on the life experiences shared by all of us. In essence, with God’s help, we can do all these things and more.

Paul has several items in his list that are easily overlooked. These items are not found in the high visibility, “gifts of the Spirit,” category of life transforming truth. In fact, they are practices deeply grounded in what all Christ followers might potentially experience on any given day. This is the reason these ordinary and personal habits will resonate in every heart. Every believer, every Christ-follower, will naturally live into these daily rituals and, if they are perceptive, they will indeed encounter the presence of God.

First, we find moments in our day that are common, ordinary, and sacred.

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. (v.1)

Perhaps we will be surprised by our personal rituals. Likely, they will not be nearly as sophisticated and elegant as what we might wish for our public persona. No, our common, every day, ordinary life produces almost nothing of noteworthy value in our Instagram feed. But those moments of mundane life speak to our souls in ways that nurture and

affirm. We are valued, even cherished, because we are the human beings that God created in God's image.

Our sleeping, and waking, and morning rituals are tangible echoes of what it means to be alive. The way we prepare our breakfast says more about us than a thousand perfect presentations at work. Have we considered just how much God appreciates the way we make our scrambled eggs and bacon in the morning? Do we think about God when we are carefully measuring out three heaping spoons of ground coffee, along with exactly 10 cups of crystal-clear water for our morning java? No, probably not. But God is there, nonetheless.

In our sleeping, and our eating, and going to work, and walking around life, we seek God, and as an act of worship, we offer every action before God as a sacred offering. Surely God takes delight in the small gestures of care and concern for every detail. Even if we do these things out of rote memory and habitual repetition, we do them in a way that offers a note of praise to God.

In fact, it is in the common and the ordinary that we find our identity in God. It is in the common and the ordinary that we find transcendent meaning in life. When we live our life on purpose with an eye toward the sacred, we find a measure of God, building and growing, shaping us into the people God desires us to be.

Perhaps we take ultimate pleasure in that first warm cup of coffee in the morning. Our daily routine resets our perspective at the beginning of each day. We break out of the cloudy slumber of nighttime rest, and we are made alive again every morning. God takes ultimate pleasure in the process of restoration, rebirth, and re-creation. The old has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17), and God's mercies are new every morning. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 2:22-23)

Second, we know there is more to life than finishing first.

Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. (v.1b)

Intuitively, we believe God loves to hear scripture as an act of worship and praise. God gave the people of Israel, and subsequently all who would follow, the word of God to guide and direct their daily habits and practices. Expressions of faith in accordance with God's sovereign plan brought divine blessings, while disobedience often brought negative consequences (curses). Doing what is right, according to the Scriptures, is essentially embracing what God does for us, turning the favor of God upon God's people into a spiritual offering that pleases the heart of God.

Unfortunately, doing what is right, according to the Word of God, is a practice that has fallen from favor it seems. Our modern culture values doing whatever it takes to finish first, to win the race, and to claim victory over our opponents, both perceived and unperceived.

Pursuing sacred encounters hidden within the ordinary and common experiences of life mandates a different value system altogether. Contentment and peace are virtues that seem to have been lost in the chaotic race for the finish in modern life. Only in the ordinary, unhurried moments of life can we genuinely embrace what God has done for us and return that gift to God.

More traditional renditions of this verse ring true to our souls. We are to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (v.1b).” Indeed, this is the “best thing” we can do for God: this is our “spiritual worship (vs.1c).”

Finding God in the ordinary helps us to transcend the cultural norms that lead us farther away from God. Our culture calls out to us to be conformed to the noisy, crazy, impassioned, violent, soul deadening pace of winning at all cost. The Apostle Paul tells us, *“Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.”*

Our transformation does not come by means of working harder at being better than our neighbor. No, genuine transformation comes from the renewal of the mind. That renewal is found in our daily habits lived out in quiet, peaceful, common, mundane, and ordinary time.

Third, we feel the presence of God in the momentary intervals of daily life.

Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. (v.2)

Paul encourages us to be quick to respond to what we recognize God wants from us. This inner transformation doesn’t happen on demand, or even when we might expect it the most. Instead, it comes from resting in the presence of God. Transformation comes most readily in those momentary intervals of daily life when we least expect to be changed. We are “transformed by the renewing of our mind (v.2b)” in these intervals that make up the transitions of life. The in-between time helps us recover from the constant assault from the outside world.

Practically speaking, our most basic, fundamental moments of community are the times when we gather with friends and family to create a meal. We find depth of meaning and value in relationship as we spend time together. In the preparation of our midday meal, we naturally slow down enough to make the connections necessary to experience genuine love for one another and spiritual truth in God.

Indeed, a chef salad is a beautiful creation, but it is more that the simple ingredients thrown randomly into the bowl. Its beauty comes in the careful presentation of each element of the delicious meal. It is in the careful cutting and preparation of the various vegetables and eggs and ham and turkey, along with the right amount and variety of cheese artfully placed on a bed of hand shredded lettuce, spinach, and kale. Each element takes time to prepare. Each has its own unique contribution to the flavor of the salad. Each one painstakingly prepared in advance. Each one contributing to the goodness of the whole.

And where do we find God in the midst of this ordinary time spent in community? God is found in the moments in-between, in the intervals standing dutifully between each major movement of life. We find God in the quiet reflections between conversations, between the laughter, between the stories, and between the tears. God reveals God-self when we are not looking for God to bring about a radical transformation. But God shows up in those intervals of life, and God changes us from the inside out.

Finally, experiencing God within the ordinary leads to spiritual maturity.

Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (v.2)

Paul reminds us that the world does not play fairly. The rules of the game remind us of the childhood game, King of the Hill. It is hard to climb your way to the top of the sandpile. The sand beneath your feet is slippery and collapses without warning. Your competition is constantly trying to pull you back or trip you up, so they can get to the top first. The one that is on top of the hill has the advantage of leverage and position. Paul says the world is “*always dragging you down to its level of immaturity.*” We experience this childhood truth is so many ways, we intuitively know the hazards of climbing that sandy hill of life.

And yet, we still try to find our way. Why? It is because we understand that our victory does not always come by standing on the top of the sandpile. Our victory comes in the struggle. Our victory come in the striving and the planning and the collaboration with others in the quest. Our ability to overcome is grounded is that which is ultimately ordinary.

Traditional translations of this passage are more familiar. In the English Standard Version, Paul writes, “by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (v.2c). Indeed, as *The Message* paraphrases the above, “*God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*” It is God’s plan that we will be overcomers. Our inner transformation will bring about a “*well-formed maturity*” that exceeds the “*immaturity*” of the world. Our maturity gained through trials and “testing” enables us to discern the perfect will of God.

Discernment is shaped on the anvil of maturity, and maturity is a gift from God. But discernment is one of those life virtues that comes at a great cost. For most of us, we make a lot of mistakes along the way in our quest for discernment and maturity. We long for the wisdom of Solomon who pleased God when he asked, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil (1 Kings 4:9).” Indeed, “It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word’ (1 Kings, 3-12a).

In our ordinary times, the common and mundane moments can veil the depth of maturity that develops within us as we spend time with God. We may feel that we are not practiced in the art of being individuals in community with others. But we are surely building the virtues we need over time to rise above the world. Rather than being dragged down, we

rise above with every act of service, loyalty, and devotion to what is considered by God to be good, acceptable and perfect.

Experiencing God in the Ordinary Time: Applying the Scriptures to Life

Finding God in the ordinary times of life does not take special training. You don't need a seminary degree or years of Bible study. In fact, you don't need to be a regular church attender in order to find God in your daily life. I know that may come as a shock to some readers. Fortunately, God has a way of breaking through the chaos and busyness of the world to speak our names and show us the way that leads to God.

Perhaps there is one daily habit practiced by many people that isolates us from a profound experience of God in these ordinary moments of life. That habit has everything to do with time and the way we manage our time. Unfortunately, most of us are slaves to time. More accurately, we are slaves to the clock. We measure our time in increments of hours rather than days, minutes over hours, and sometimes seconds over moments. We are slaves to the minute hand on our watches, or the digital numbers on our cell phones.

If you have more than one alarm set on your cell phone, you may be addicted to the tyranny of time over humanity. If your meetings are measured in minutes rather than tasks accomplished, then perhaps you are a slave to the clock.

To find God in the ordinary, slow down and savor the relationships that fill those moments. More important, embellish the intervals in your day when you have nothing planned at all. This may bring about an existential crisis for some folks. Give it a try.

I often share this analogy with folks who come to visit me for pastoral counseling. Counseling is much like weightlifting. It's not the time spend on the counselor's couch that matters most, just as it is not the time that is spent physically lifting the maximum amount of weight possible. It is the time in between visits when all the advancements and improvements are accomplished. It is the time of rest between the lifting sessions that allow a weightlifter to recover and get stronger. It is in the time between counseling sessions that a client has time to reflect and get better.

That said, it is the time between our spiritual experiences that we get to find rest in the presence of God. In those interval moments, in the ordinary time, we grow deeper in our faith and trust in God. It is in the quiet times that we can reflect on the power and presence of God. It is in those in-between times that we learn more about our relationship with God so that we can lean on God when the moment calls for strength beyond our ability.

This week, do a time audit. Make a note of how long you spend on the various tasks in your day. Reflect on the amount of space that you make for your relationship with God. Are you wasting time anywhere? What can you do to change that?

Defining our personal liturgy:

What are the routines of our day that anchor us to life and faith?

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. – Matthew 6:33

In my spiritual disciplines, I have worked toward a regular, daily time of prayer and reflection to bring me closer to God. I find that a sustained habit of rising early to pray and meditate on scripture gives me the ability to focus and center my day on spiritual matters. It is as if the priority of God first allows my day to fall into place with practices that resonate with that morning ritual.

I use a book and app entitled ***Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*** to guide my daily prayers. It allows me to pray morning, noon and evening with prayers and liturgies designed to follow the Common Lectionary of the Church. Many Protestant and Catholic traditions follow the Common Lectionary for regular Scripture reading. The process is modeled after the Book of Common Prayer often used in the Anglican tradition.

Rising at sunrise, I habitually greet my dog with her morning breakfast, and I make my first cup of coffee before settling in behind my computer to explore the prayers for the day. This routine allows me to think on the things of God first, before checking in on the local news, the emails in my Outlook, or any messages waiting on my voicemail. It sets the priority for my day.

The ritual of praying three times per day allows me a measure of consistency that has been lacking in my prayer life. Some of the prayers are identical, so it creates a rhythm that feels comfortable and safe. It also reminds me to be prayerful, with a spirit of gratitude, as I partake of each meal. The time of preparation, in anticipation of the prayers to come, allows a few quiet moments spent in the presence of God.

One unique ritual that I repeat daily is to light a candle before each devotion. The candle is a reminder of the sacred space I create on my computer and in my workspace. It is a reminder of the intentional and purposeful establishment of a God-space where I might encounter God in fresh new ways.

Exploring our personal growth: How can we expand those sacred glimpses of the divine?

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. – Isaiah 55:6

In the moments between the actual practice of my daily liturgy, I find God to be present in tangible ways. The sense of God being present, through the Holy Spirit, can be a fleeting encounter. If I have created space for margins in my schedule (i.e. quiet, unplanned, and unscheduled time), I am able to press in on those moments to allow sufficient time for the divine to expand into the space we have created.

If I am not rushing to the next event on my calendar, I can allow for an extended moment of silence, or a longer prayer time, or a creative moment of reflection to linger. Allowing time for the “spill over” of the Spirit, gives me permission to simply spend time alone with God. When there is no agenda, I can quiet my soul and simply listen for God’s leading.

When I first encountered God in these interval moments, I didn't quite know what to do with the time. Reimagining the passage of time allowed me to soak in the moment and allow God to be God in my life.

Just and Eli told Samuel to respond to the Lord's voice, "Speak LORD for your servant hears. (1 Samuel 3:9), we can also respond to the inaudible voice of the Lord with a response that opens the dialogue to the holy and sacred.

If we can hear the prompting of God, our faith will grow deeper and wider as the Lord reveals more to us. The more we practice hearing and responding to God's voice, the more God will speak our names.

In all things Ordinary:

- God is present.
- God is available.
- God is patient.
- God is kind.
- God is good.

Our ordinary time becomes sacred when we invite God into each moment of our day.

The miracle of God's presence is most evident is the way God meets us in the ordinary, common, every day, mundane routines of life. God is with me when I hit the snooze button on my alarm. God is pleased by the order in which I prepare my morning coffee. God is with me when I pray at sunrise, setting my priority list for the day. God is present as I work with others in community to prepare the mid-day meal. God is with me when I nap in the afternoon. God is there as we do the dishes in the kitchen. God is present as my day comes to an end, and I prepare to rest. As Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human

existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

And, God is present with you in all things ordinary and common in your life. God whispers your name as you fall asleep. God loves the creative beauty of all things great and small. There is no task or activity too mundane for God. Because God makes all things holy.

We celebrate God in the ordinary time that is transformed into sacred time. Because God alone is worthy of our praise. In every moment, in every pause, and in every interval in-between, God is with us and we are forever changed. Transformed into the image of God by the grace of God.

Suggested resources for personal devotion:

- Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life, Thomas Moore
- The Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in everyday Life, Tish Harrison Warren
- Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals, Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Enuma Okoro
- The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence

Rev. Cliff Ritter