

Finding The Extraordinary

Dr Lois Dodds (Part 2 of 7)



I have been thinking more about this idea that our ordinary lives are actually channels for God's extraordinary purposes. In so many things in daily life God speaks to me through the ordinary. When I am having to clean the house, when I am baking bread, when I am pruning plants, even curling my hair, those are experiences in which God can speak to me.

I remember some very dear friends in Peru, Maria and Manuel. They were very cosmopolitan Peruvians, because both of them had parents who were ambassadors so they actually grew up in Europe but came back to live in Peru, and we became very good friends. Manuel was an Orthopaedic Surgeon. After we had been friends for a few months and spent a lot of time together, Maria and Manuel told us that if it hadn't been for our friendship their marriage might have crumbled. One thing they also said is that what they noticed about us is that we were authentic. We were real people. They have known some famous Christian and they always referred to this person as 'the Tin Soldier' because, they said, he is empty on the inside. He is just 'all show' on the outside. But you and Larry are different. There is something different inside of you. This friendship was very winsome to them and through us they came to know Jesus. But it was mostly through sharing ordinary things of life – going to the beach together, cooking dinner together, playing with our children at the beach or at the park, doing the normal things of life; but when those normal things were filled with God's spirit, they had extraordinary outcomes.

I think that we have a choice in ordinary things. We have a choice to get bogged down in the ordinary, because that is what most of life is, and when we get bogged down we lose the vision, we lose the big picture. What good is it having to wash all these dishes after we have had people over? What good is it having to change all these beds because we have been hospitable? What good is it to keep on cooking and cooking and cooking and maybe people don't even appreciate it? And yet these ordinary things are the channels for God's extraordinary purposes, and when we keep the big picture, and we see that God will use all of these things, there's purpose and meaning even in cleaning the toilets. Now, most of us don't particularly enjoy that task. I doubt if you enjoy it.

Or maybe if you are a guy it's changing the oil in a car. What does it have to do with the big picture of God's purposes, of why you went to that extraordinary place? These ordinary tasks seem sometimes to be so far from what we want to do, from our lofty purpose, and yet they are part of the whole. I think that we have a choice in the ordinary things to say, 'God, please remind me how this fits the big picture. Help me to see how you infuse the ordinary so that it becomes purposeful, so that your purpose is achieved. Help me to see how washing all these dishes or cleaning the windows or making the bread, fits your big purpose.'

Now I am a person who loves decorating. I love interior decorating. I love design. I was an Art Major in high school. I love art, so to me life needs to be beautiful. I see that as one of our needs in life. God builds into some of us a need for order or beauty or music. He builds into some people a need for visual spaces, into some people a need for being able to do things with one's hands. But as for me, God built into me this love of beauty, and so I have always enjoyed transforming environments, to make them more beautiful for people, because I believe that beauty speaks to the soul and gives rest to the spirit.

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Yet if you have ever moved into a grubby old house, you know it takes a lot of work. Maybe where you live you have a grubby house. We have lived in houses with mud walls but even those I want to make beautiful. But, you know, it takes a lot of work to make that happen - a lot of very ordinary tasks, sweeping and sanding and painting. But if you have the big purpose in mind, those tasks don't have to be a chore, they can actually become a labour of love. The same with your children - you are creating persons through your daily labours of love with your children, or with your husband, picking up the socks, putting the clothes in the hamper, doing the laundry. All of those tasks are really labours of love and if you keep the big picture, you choose the big picture, then every one of those has meaning. I think with we chafe under this though when we are people of great purpose, when we have a desire to do the lofty things, and yet so much of life is daily.

I want to share a couple of other poems with you. These are really from my journal and our years in Peru but they show you some of the ways that the ordinary things speak to us. This is 'Housewife':

A thousand details hanging, dangling, need rewoven in my life,
snagged by the world, threadbare through strain, areas shrunk, hot water.
Master Weaver, redesign,
my tapestry reweave.

Do you ever feel snagged and torn and maybe tattered? That's from the dailyness of life but God is your healer.

This is 'From my little garden':

Paradox.
Up from one seed one vine has sprung
and on its tender branches hung
sweet peppers.
Paradox.
Sweet, but hot, like bride's breath,
each one different, no two convolutions equal,
dimpled, dappled, ruffled, rounded, squashed and turbaned.
Lustrous shades from red to green and curious combinations.

One vine up, from one seed, but each one is unique.
Like a miracle that I, in my vine, am unequal and distinct from every other fruit that sips his sap.

And how about the rain? God can speak to you through the ordinary rain.

How sweet the rain like tears from heaven, washing fresh the face of earth.
L'Abri, Lord, my house, I want it to be a house of joy.
Your house filled with your purpose.

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I want it to be beautiful, reflecting your beauty, who authored beauty.
I want it to be warm, giving back the warmth you give to me.
I want it to be large enough for all who come.
I want it to shelter lives in turmoil, hearts in distress.
Make my house, your house Lord, your home.

Right now we are building another home. We built a home in the jungle many years ago, and for that construction we used the woods of the jungle. The Amazon jungle has incredible beautiful hard woods – one kind we used was so hard you had to actually drill a hole to put the nail in. One of the things I wanted very much in Peru was to make our home a beautiful sanctuary. Now I am speaking rustic beautiful, because we didn't have glass windows, we only had screens. We didn't have the right kind of building materials compared to what one would have in a more developed place, but we used the jungle woods that were truly beautiful and Larry and I sanded those floors four times on our hands and knees, and we varnished them with Spar varnish and they were absolutely beautiful. Larry built our furniture out of jungle wood and he built our cupboards and the table.

One of the most joyful moments I had was the visit of Chief Tariri. He was a famous Chief in the jungle in those days. There was a book written about him. But Chief Tariri came to our home. Now in his own culture in his tribe he had a big house, but of course it was a different style. It would have had a thatched roof and a palm bark floor, but he was a man of status and he came into our home and he had such depth of appreciation. He stroked the finished wood of the jungle and he said, 'I never knew our wood could be so beautiful.' Now the beauty of that wood spoke to him because God was in it and God honoured our desire to make a beautiful place, a sanctuary.

Our very good friends Mowra and Marcos came to visit. Marcos was a pastor among one of the Quechua groups up in the Andes mountains. They lived quite a simple life but Marcos was a weaver, that's how he earned their income. When he wasn't doing Bible translation he was weaving. He wove many beautiful pieces of cloth for me, but on the day they came to visit our home he also stroked the wood of the jungle and he said, 'I've never known this wood could be so beautiful.'

Then he saw a weaving on the wall. We had bought it for 23 dollars in Yucatan and carried it home to the States on top of our station wagon, and then we brought it to Peru and this weaving was made of Sisal, so it was rather a heavy fabric. It was actually meant to be a rug. But it was a jaguar, and out of the mouth of the jaguar rolls these big curls like a roar, and for me it was worth the 23 dollars and carting that thing to two continents, to hear Marcos say, 'This is so beautiful.' And he felt it and he touched it and he studied it and he found God in that piece of art. It was an ordinary thing in one sense but he found in it inspiration to do more beautiful weaving.

As we have been thinking about the ordinary things of life maybe this has been a day for you where you have just had too much ordinariness: fixing the car, the car breaking down one more time, flat tyres, kids getting sick, people not keeping their word and inconveniencing you so that you had to reschedule, maybe you had to ride the bus four days to go to a meeting and found that it was cancelled, or maybe you had

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to go four hours on the bus in the city where you live and found that the meeting was cancelled - so much ordinary stuff seemingly detracting from our lofty purpose, God's extraordinary plan in our life. But I want to encourage you because as other people watch your life it's in the ordinary things that they see God visible in you.