

Finding The Extraordinary

Dr Lois Dodds (Part 5 of 7)



How is your ordinary life today? I imagine you've had a lot of regular tasks to do. Maybe you had to fix the office machines. Maybe you had to run more errands than you wanted to. One of our friends spent a whole day just trying to buy a stopper for the kitchen sink. I imagine you can relate to that! As you are in an extraordinary place with an extraordinary purpose, life is very ordinary, and it is easy to get bogged down. I want to remind you, though, that the ordinary is really the channel through which God brings about extraordinary outcomes.

Our son Michael plays the violin. He started playing the violin in 5th Grade (Year 4) and now it is one of those areas in his life where we have seen God answer prayer in wonderful ways and encourage many many people through his gifts. The ordinary part is that when Michael was in High School he practised the violin five hours a day. Now, he didn't like to go to bed until about 1 am and I used to worry and then I'd say finally, "He's never sick, he's never cranky and he gets very good grades, so why I am worried?"

But what I saw through the discipline of five hours a day of violin practice was that that discipline brought Michael the right or the capacity to produce beautiful music. It actually brought him freedom to create music and freedom to interpret music that was only possible because of the ordinary discipline involved in it. Had he been less disciplined, he would not have arrived at a place of great freedom where he could make the violin sing and worship and be a beautiful instrument to praise God.

Our daughter Catherine and her husband Steve lived in a country where there was a lot of terrorism. They lived there for twelve years under terrorism. People like their next door neighbour were imprisoned at times. Friends they knew were killed. Many people they knew were in bombings. On one occasion they came back home for a short break to the States and on the same plane were the bodies of two aid workers who were killed in the town where they lived. So they went through a great deal in twelve years under terrorism.

I remember Catherine saying to me on one occasion, 'Mum, I really want our friends Sybil and Michel to know about Jesus. I really want them to become Christians but I am so afraid that because of all these bad things happening - we ourselves are always frustrated, and there is always something hard to deal with - I am really afraid they won't see Jesus in us.'

But after being friends for 3 years (Sybil and Michel were there with the Embassy from their country), before they left the country, they said to Catherine and Steve, 'Because you are so real - you are not pretending: you are real people - you are the first people that we have known who have made us want to become Christians too.' And this young couple, Sybil and Michel, became followers of Jesus because Catherine and Steve, in the ordinary unease of living in terrorism, still allowed Jesus to somehow show through them. They had twin babies; they had a toddler; life was hard, but something came through to their friends Sybil and Michel. So the structure of their lives, very much filled with the ordinary, was still the venue or the avenue for Jesus to be seen in them.

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I think, especially as we are rearing little children in hard places, it's helpful to remind ourselves how God is in this. It's an incredible creative enterprise, made up of peanut butter and jelly and sweeping floors and washing diapers, but it is an incredible purpose.

*These precious ones you gave to me
to guard and teach awhile,
created by your hand,
in mind before the world began:
I want to teach them well,
to love them with your love
so I can give them back to you,
trunks straight, branches strong, leaves full,
fruit ready for your picking.
Give me dexterous hands, an eye for beauty
and love for pruning well.*

This one is 'Birth Canal':

*Lord let me, your channel,
be a birth canal
to bring to life a child of yours.
Let me labour in your strength.
Let me nurture with your love.
Let me give and live
pregnant with grace.*

I wrote this poem when we had a young anthropologist visiting us. He was there to research some of the native groups, and through our friendship he became a Christian: through living with us, through sharing ordinary daily life. Yet on the spiritual side I felt it to be intense. It was like carrying a child. It was like going through labour for him to come to a spiritual birth. But where did it happen? Right in the midst of everyday life. When we live in countries or cities or villages that are full of human need, it is extremely hard to sort out: how in the world does the dailyness of my life relate to the needs of all these people? I am so small. I am one person. What can I do? Again, it's helpful to think about the ordinary that is hidden in the extraordinary.

'Sanctuary': perhaps around you are women ready to give birth.

*The womb was created for shelter,
to nourish the helpless,
protect the miracle of life.
In secret sanctuary the treasure anchors*

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*surrounded by love,
wet warmth,
softness as the life of faith,
dependency,
abiding in the life that brought it into being.
Content to receive and grow
until its rite of passage dawns
and birth makes giving a necessity.*

As you are abiding in Jesus and his life is abiding in you and you long to share that life with other people, you long for people to see this love, remember that they are going to see it in you through the most ordinary things: your attitude, the attributes of your character. These are the things that people see.

When we were in the Amazon, Larry, my husband, was one of the medical doctors and we took care of the native peoples in our area. Sometimes Larry would say to them, 'Why did you come so far to come to our clinic? Here you have to pay 25 cents. If you went to another hospital in the area they would treat you free. Why do you come here knowing it is going to cost you 25 cents?' And the people usually said, 'It is because here you treat me like a person.' What people felt was the love of God that was in that place. Actually we had many many visitors come to our jungle centre and over and over again they would say to us, 'Tell us the secret of your organisation. What makes this such a wonderful harmonious place? Tell us your secret.' We would laugh and say, 'There is no secret. We have no organisational secret. Everyone here loves God and we are all here because we want to serve God and the peoples of Peru. Our secret is that we love, which is of course, a very much needed thing in the world but it really isn't a secret thing.'

My friend Chris Wood has a new book out by Intervarsity Press. It is called 'Character Witness'. It is a wonderful book and in this book Chris tells many stories - including some about me - that show it is our character that is what wins people to Jesus, not building hospitals, not building schools. Those are all good things and they are good work but what really attracts people is who we are as persons and how we live our daily lives. So, as you think about your character witness, ask Jesus to make himself more visible in you today, tonight, this week, so that everything you do, whether it is buying a stopper for the kitchen sink or changing the oil in the car yet one more time, or fixing that vehicle that is crumbling rapidly, that in all these everyday things God be visible in you.