

Finding The Extraordinary

Dr Lois Dodds (Part 7 of 7)



I remember when we first went to live overseas, both Larry and I had a great passion to make our lives count for God. We were very dedicated to the idea of serving people through medicine and counselling and writing or teaching. We wanted our lives to make a difference, but part of the shock of our experience was discovering that it was so hard to adjust ourselves to the new reality that we were often disappointed that we were really not living out our lofty purposes to the extent that we wanted. I found that very depressing in the beginning, because I found it was much harder to love people, the actual real people like the ones who spit on my floor, than to love people in sort of a generic sense.

*To be like Jesus - we say, we pray,
but he was not only love, compassion, justice, peace;
he was suffering, rejection, anguish, grief.
To be like him –
take his passion with his beauty;
his death with his resurrection;
his rejection with his ascension.*

It's easy for us to say, 'I want to be like Jesus and I want to make him visible', but when we actually enter into what we might call the negative side of that - his suffering, his rejection - that doesn't feel good and it sometimes feels like we've lost our lofty purpose somehow if those things are happening. Yet Jesus went through some kind of culture shock in this world. He certainly was not well adapted to it. He had a lofty purpose and he came here and he got nailed to the cross. So what about you and me? It helps me to remember that Jesus went through this kind of change too.

*You have culture shock too, Jesus.
Your values were in conflict.
You trembled at the money-mongers and raged that holy was profaned.
You wept at callous pride which kept your chicks from brooding.
You were dismayed at disbelief.
You were marked for being what your heaven culture made you.
You stuck out like any gringo with your white Spirit.
You were estranged from Father, surrounded by a babbling throng.
They never understood you.
Your language was so strange - you talked of Spirit when they asked for bread.
They beat you and let your blood run down the cross - that was the final shock.
They broke your body then, but you never did acculturate.
God, this culture shock is getting me - be my shock absorber.
Shore up my sagging springs and cushion the jolts that rattle my mind and shake my very foundations.*

Learning to be like Jesus in an extraordinary way, in an extraordinary place, with his passion, with his purpose, those are not easy transitions. I want to encourage you to remember that in all your transitions, in your needs, he knows what it feels like because he went through this.

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What you're going through he went through for you and for me, and he is your source of power to get you through the ordinary and the extraordinary difficult things of life in this place where you now are.

You're far from home, far from people who love you, far from people who understand; maybe you even go home at night and cry because it's still so hard to learn the language, to know what people really mean, to have them really understand you. Maybe nobody can even say your name right - that happened to me. My Peruvian friends never did learn to say Lois right, they still call me Luis - but that's ok. These are the things that lead us to a sense of loneliness and when they pile up and up we can feel like we're overwhelmed. But when I think of Jesus going through culture shock and that he did it specifically for you and for me, it makes sense of it. It's purposeful, and it means that I also can endure, but enduring in a hard place means I'm probably going to weep a lot of tears for the needy people around me. It probably means I'm going to get really angry sometimes at all the injustice that I see. I'll be very afraid sometimes because there is real danger out there and a lot of imagined danger too. But, in all of these ordinary emotions, God is there for us and he gives us his promises to sustain us.

When I was in our early years overseas, I was ill a great deal. Life was very hard for me. I actually was depressed a lot because of the poverty and the conditions under which so many people lived. I felt overwhelmed with the degree of need in my own smallness. But God began to show me as I sought him day by day what his agenda for each day was, and that in my ordinary life events I could include other people in a way that would change their life. I want you to ask God to help you see that reality today. Whatever's facing you that may seem ordinary, he can help you do it in a way that has an eternal outcome.

I was also ill a lot, and I found that illness particularly challenged my ability to trust God, because when I was ill, it meant I wasn't able to be up and serving God - I couldn't even serve my children or my husband, lying in bed with hepatitis. So, what did God have in mind for me anyway? After all, I went there to serve Him, but what God said to me over and over is: Lois, my main purpose for having you here is that I am changing you so that you can make me more visible. And as you make me more visible, whether you're lying in bed, or cooking, or writing, or editing a book, it's my life in you that's becoming visible - that's the important thing - not how many jobs you get done.

Now this is a very hard piece of learning I think if we're westerners and we're used to high production, a lot of achievement. We want to have something to show for it - don't we? Yet God's life in us is a transformational process. He primarily works through the ordinary things; sometimes he gives us extraordinary experiences, but for his passion and his purpose to be visible in us, we have to trust him in the sickness, in the poverty, in the frustrations. I pray that God will bless you today as you think about having him show more and more through you.