

# The God of the Mundane



Reflections on Ordinary Life for  
Ordinary People

(second edition)

Matthew B. Redmond

CruciformPress





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For Bethany

**CruciformPress**

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“Nearly everyone I know, including me, is in desperate need of sensing the sacramental nature of daily life—how routines, homework, housework, and every normal, little thing can be a means of grace. In *The God of the Mundane*, **Matt Redmond has done us a wonderful service in infusing the ordinary with glory, helping us slow down, reflect, and praise the Lord** who is with us at all times.”

**Jared C. Wilson**, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry, Spurgeon College; author, *The Imperfect of Disciple*

“If anyone is looking for biblical proof that God does His best work in the ordinary, simple, no-fanfare places of life, we need look no further than the life of Christ Himself. Hailing from an obscure, unrecognized town, born to a young and mostly unseen couple, working a blue-collar job, and teaching all those parables featuring the simple stuff of life, Christ demonstrated that God chooses and even delights in ‘the weak things’ as a primary means by which to save the world. **Of all the books written to help us reconnect with this vital reality, I cannot think of a better and more life-giving one than *The God of the Mundane*.**”

**Scott Sauls**, senior pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church; author of several books, including *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *A Gentle Answer*

“Often I’m seduced by the glam, glitter, and glory of the epic life. I’m induced to be an Influencer. When I miss the mark, I’m deflated with the ‘what-if’s’ of my little life. Thankfully, **Matt Redmond shakes me out of the lies of chasing the ‘boastful pride of life’ and brings me to a God who calls us to the ordinary glories found only in Him.** This book will help you see that glorious God as well.”

**Jeremy Writebol**, lead campus pastor, Woodside Bible Church; executive director, Gospel-Centered Discipleship

“Too often we act as though living a quiet and godly life is a sad concession, rather than a high aspiration (1 Thess. 4:11). *The God of the Mundane* helps us recapture a biblical vision of the ‘ordinary’ Christian life in a way that I pray will resonate deep within its readers.”

**Aaron Armstrong**, Brand Manager, The Gospel Project;  
author, *Epic*, and *Awaiting a Savior*

“At a time when we are encouraged to believe that the next revival is just around the corner if we try hard enough, or that we are wasting our lives if we are not ‘making a significant impact’; and in a contemporary culture where the biggest and best demand our adulation and aspirations, **Redmond’s book comes as a breath of fresh air.**

“**Founded on Scripture and steeped in reality, this book reminds us that we have been listening to the wrong story.** God’s extraordinary grace is seen through, not in spite of, the ordinariness of life. Perhaps, just as we need to redeem the word ‘secular’ and develop a more earthy spirituality, it is time also to honor God, the ‘Creator Mundi,’ by choosing to live well in the mundane world He has created for us and inhabits with us.”

**Dr. David J. Montgomery**, Associate Regional Secretary,  
IFES Europe (International Fellowship of Evangelical  
Students)

“Matthew B. Redmond recognizes that most of us have always lived mundane lives, are living mundane lives, and will always live mundane lives. And he knows we need encouragement. Matt’s common sense, personal credibility, and winsome wit make this book about celebrating the ordinary and extraordinary contribution to our understanding of the Jesus-shaped life.”

**Chaplain Mike Mercer**, lead writer at InternetMonk.com,  
author, *Walking Home Together: Spiritual Guidance and  
Practical Advice for the End of Life*, and *Show Me the Path:  
Cultivating a Life of Discernment*

“Deep calls to deep across the pages of *The God of the Mundane*. **Matt Redmond’s meek, considered prose affirms the deep desire so many of us harbor: to live quietly, faithfully while the rest of the world grows louder.** Can we actually shape our world without seizing the spotlight? Redmond reminds us that, with the God of the mundane, all things are possible.”

**Aarik Danielsen**, *Fathom Magazine* columnist

*Such a day of small things still,  
but on God's terms, and that is enough.  
Size as well as time and space count nothing with Him.*

~ Liliat Trotter<sup>1</sup>





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## CruciformPress

We like to keep it simple. So we publish clear, useful, inexpensive, mostly short books for Christians and other curious people. Books that make sense and are easy to read, even as they tackle serious subjects.

We do this because the good news of Jesus Christ—the gospel—is the only thing that actually explains why this world is so wonderful and so awful all at the same time. Even better, the gospel applies to every single area of life, and offers real answers that aren't available from any other source.

These are books you can afford, enjoy, finish easily, benefit from, and remember. [Check us out and see.](#)

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# Foreword

*God made man out of nothing, and as long as we are nothing, He can make something out of us.*

– Martin Luther<sup>2</sup>

I recently read *The God of the Mundane* for the first time.

No, really.

You may not know this, but many writers never sit down and read their book from front to back. That was certainly the case for me. I had read at least part of a chapter aloud for an event. And I had seen quotes floating around online. But the closest I had ever come to reading the book was in the editorial process, and that is nothing like reading a book at all.

But I wanted to read like it anyone else would. Straight through. And the reason was to decide if it still held up. The book had gone out of print and, for the sake of my new publisher, I wanted to read through it and clean it up where necessary for this second edition.

Of course, like any sane writer, when I say that

I wanted to read it straight through, I mean I had no desire to read it at all. I have written many articles and blog posts and poems over the years. Some were read widely. Some were read only by me. Regardless, there are only a handful I can enjoy reading, and I say that as one who loves to read. To tell you how little I looked forward to sitting down and reading this book, I cut the grass.

I hate cutting grass.

A writer has few joys and many sorrows. One of those joys is when they read something they have written, and can enjoy it and think, *That is pretty good*. As if someone else had written it. But that is rare for me. So I had no desire to read *The God of the Mundane*. And yet there was some spark within me, something that wanted to see if the book you are holding was ever any good, and therefore worth the effort of releasing a second edition.

When this little book was first published in 2012, it basically stood alone. At that time, the zeitgeist of much of conservative Christian culture was that we should all want to do something big for God. Be radical. I thought that was an okay message, but I could not read the New Testament and see it as a consistent message.

Since then, many books have talked about this problem. Go ahead, go search Amazon's Christian Living section for *mundane* or *ordinary*. There are

a number of similar books available now. Clearly, I wasn't the only one concerned about what was being preached and taught.

So, of course I wondered if what I had said was still worth saying. Some of those books are by some big-name authors. *Real authors.*

By the time the first edition of this book was released, I was working in a bank. It was a truly miserable experience. And I am not ashamed to say I kept one half of a Xanax in my desk at all times. I had some moments of success on that job, but for the most part I was swimming against the flow. I felt like a kid in a grown man's clothes. Every night was one of creeping dread. Sleep was a forgetful bliss, but it just made the next workday arrive all the sooner.

One story.

In 2013, after the book had been released, I was struggling to achieve even the minimal sales expectations for my bank branch. Then my dad was hospitalized and died a few weeks later. It was devastating in many ways. Not only did I miss a lot of work, but when I returned, I found the job even harder. Never more than a mediocre salesman of banking products, now I was a terrible one.

When that quarter ended, I was called into the manager's office where she and my regional manager were waiting. The verdict was in. Because I had failed to achieve the minimum sales expectations, I was now

on probation. One of them pointed to a time period on a calendar and said, “This is when things started going bad for you, like you didn’t care about your job.” That period was when my dad was in the hospital dying. They didn’t make the connection, and I didn’t say anything. And then my regional manager said something to the effect of, “Sometimes this job seems very mundane...” He said more but all I could hear was that word. *Mundane*. He did know about the book—*Did he say that on purpose? Was he using my own thesis against me?* To this day, I don’t know.

I just sat there, stunned in the belly of a whale.

My wife is wise. She saw the toll all this was taking on me and our family. So one day she casually suggested I go talk to someone. A professional. A counselor. Maybe get some vocational advice, a clearer sense of direction. This is something I had never done and never considered. Until that point I had been an upbeat, positive person, the one who recommended others “get help.”

This was hard. Like admitting-a-final-defeat hard. Losing is difficult, say in sports, when you’re on the field of play. But then you get to go home and clean up, practice some more, and try again. Vocational defeat is different. You can leave work at work, but the defeat rides home with you, goes inside, and waits for you—in the kitchen, in the shower, in your favorite chair.

I finally went to see a counselor. And to be honest,

the experience turned out to be very different from what I expected.

I knew this counselor. We were not close friends, but I knew him. His love of Bruce Springsteen helped me feel comfortable sitting down with him.

I don't remember much about what we said that day. It started with small talk, and then he asked why I was there. Not long after this, still toward the beginning of that first meeting, he let me know that when people came to him looking for vocational advice, he recommended...

...wait for it

...wait for it

...my book.

That was quite possibly the weirdest moment of my life. I can remember nothing else from that meeting, or the subsequent one. And that was it. No more sessions. I knew I had lost perspective and now needed to claw back to a place where I could find it again.

I needed to believe the message of my own book.

I tell you all this because, having actually read it now, I think it's pretty good. Maybe even more importantly I, the author, has had to struggle with these issues, and most likely always will.

My new Publisher calls the focus of this book an "evergreen" subject. When I told him I had my doubts about the need for republication, he said, "No, this is

an issue that will not go away any time soon.” I agreed with him because I know it will not go away from me.



# Preface from a Pandemic

*La gloria di colui che tutto move per l'universo  
penetra, e risplende. (The glory of the One who  
moves all things permeates the universe and  
glows.)* – Dante<sup>3</sup>

As I write this, Bach's *B Minor Mass* plays softly from across the living room, which we treat more like a study, what with all the shelves of books and records and the amount of reading and listening to music we do in here. And we have spent a lot of time in this space, not to mention the whole house. But it's quiet right now except for the music and an occasional movement from down the hall or from outside.

Our children have scattered. One is on a walk up the street to visit the mini-library in a neighbor's front yard, with hopes of petting a dog or cat along the way. She joins the dozens who now stroll by our house every day. There are times when, for hours, someone is always walking in front of our home. It makes me wonder if

this is what it is like to live in a city where people walk everywhere. Sometimes people are on solitary rambles. At other times couples hold hands or families noisily pass by, taking the circus on the road, as it were.

As I finished the above paragraph, the needle on my turntable lifted automatically and set itself down with a soft click, letting me know the “Kyrie” is finished and it is time to put that LP away and move on to side two and the “Gloria.” My son gets himself some water, checks his phone, and goes back to his room to read or play with the Lego sets he has just rediscovered. Toys usually forgotten a few months after Christmas are, by the magic of boredom, now new again. Old books are reread.

My wife moves from an intricate Japanese-inspired paint-by-numbers set to a puzzle she works on in fits and spurts. Amidst the quiet, with time neither mattering nor demanding, we talk about the events of the day and wonder about the days to come.

We sit in the front yard in the mornings, afternoons, and in the evenings with a book at hand or music playing, waving at neighbors. Some of these neighbors we know well. Others we have just met because they see us in our front yard every day. Sometimes we see them in their front yard as we walk around the block.

We check our phones.

I have read more books in the last few months than ever before. Sometimes I sit and listen to records

without any distractions, letting the music wash over me like waves, sometimes crashing and at other times gently gathering onto the shores of a world of wonder.

Another son comes in from weeding, announcing he found a turtle in the “garden.” His smile is from ear to ear. This is the second time in a week he has been startled by a turtle, the first being on a hike. But he is smiling through the dirt and sweat because he knows his mom will pay him a few dollars for the work.

We’ve always done a lot of hikes—never long ones because we love our typically non-hiking teenagers. But over the past few months we have hiked more than usual. And they have enjoyed it more than usual—or at least the teenaged ones among us have complained less than usual. The trails are more crowded than usual. Where else are people going to go? It is comforting to be among the trees and dirt and rocks and boulders. For there, creation is doing what it is supposed to do “on earth as it is in heaven.” Maybe in the midst of all the chaos being beamed into our homes, the obedience of nature is softly echoing the balm of Gilead.

By the end of May, our kids stopped asking, “What are we going to do today?” Okay, that’s a lie. They kept asking. But not as much, and you could hear the lack of expectation in their voices. It’s not disappointment so much as a settled resignation. So many of the days have been repeats of earlier days that the kids are now used to a new routine, which is really the lack of a routine.

We've had our moments, though, when it was harder than usual. Arguments over video games, and who gets to watch what and sit where, and who will eat the last of something. These have sometimes colored our days, and truly darkened others. Some days we've all felt antsy and just needed to drive around and go get groceries, even though we do not enjoy wearing a mask. And some days, everyone just needed some time alone.

*A soft click tells me to finish the "Gloria" on side three.*

But those first couple of months were permeated with small glories I wonder if we will ever see again. Glories obscured by the hustle and bustle. Glories grown dusty from disuse. Glories overlooked and forgotten. Glories sitting in dark corners, ignored because we are a people spring-loaded for the constant going and coming, the pushing and pulling, the lane-changing and accelerating.

We are not a people of stopping and slowing down and taking in the ordinary parts of life, so as to see the glory within. To use Dante's language, we might believe God's glory permeates everything, but we simply do not have the time or inclination to look for it in the mundane parts of our lives.

But a pandemic will force you to do that.

And that glory does glow. It shimmers in the breeze around noon when everyone is at home and able to do something never really possible before on

a Tuesday—eat lunch together. The glory glows like fireflies in June dusk, which you never noticed before because evenings were masked by the false luminescence of ball-field lights, or by sitting in traffic listening to talk radio. And the glory glows in the smiles of your family when small joys like homemade ice cream illumine time and make it bend back on itself because memories are swallowed with every lift of the spoon.

*Another soft click signals the end of the “Gloria.”  
Now the resounding “Credo.”*

As Christians, we know this glory permeates everything because the One whom Dante spoke of not only Himself permeates all things, He created all things. And according to Paul, in Christ all things hold together. I think we who are disciples of this Christ must acknowledge this as a tenet of our faith, but our confidence in such realities is low nevertheless.

And that low confidence is seen when life itself must slow down, and all that had distracted us before—jobs, commutes, school activities, sports, live entertainment, parties, church events—are not options anymore. A slow life in the western hemisphere is a boring life for the vast majority. It’s full of what everyone else is doing—the ordinary parts of life.

*The “Sanctus” now moves through the room, filling this small, familiar space. The only other sound is the warm, subtle crackling of a vinyl record showing its age.*

You could watch on social media how people fought against it. They were worried about their kids getting bored. They were itching for something to change. They complained about the lack of things to do.

I understand this.

But I was more worried about what kind of person I would be. Would I be able to mine this time and space for all it offered? Would I waste it on complaints and fear and anger? Those temptations were constantly at my elbow. I lost my job as a teacher—a job I loved. So not only did that disappointment and sadness touch us, but also the concern about how to move forward amid a global pandemic.

*Side five has ended and now the “Osanna,” “Benedictus,” “Agnus Dei,” and “Dona Nobis Pacem” awaits.*

I felt no urgency. Though the world slowed down and my job came to an end, I enjoyed a confidence I had never known amidst such looming uncertainty. The temptation was to seek a kind of *ékstasis*, a feeling of ecstasy. Instead, I kept on as before—the ordinary pursuit of God: prayer each morning, passage memorization and recitation, fasting, Bible reading and study. Nothing fancy. Nothing crazy. Nothing I was not doing before I lost my job.

So circumstances shifted but my confidence did not. God did not change. And my experience with him did not change. The God of the mundane I had written

about years before was for us also the God of peace in a world seemingly brought to a standstill, yet somehow also moving at the speed of anger.

This is going to sound like bragging, but I would like to risk it: I was getting more emails and messages than usual about the need for *The God of the Mundane*. People would say something to the effect of: “We need this message now more than ever.” I thought the same thing because it was all we had. And I wanted people to hear and be reminded of what Dante said, “The glory of the One who moves all things permeates the universe and glows.”

The mundane glows. And now is a good time to see the glowing.





# Introduction

*I'm 40, I have a master's degree, and now I'm having to learn how to be a bank teller. – Me*

When I wrote *The God of the Mundane*, it was the work of a pastor. I felt like I had seen something encouraging—liberating—for those who were in my charge and beyond. And I heard as much from those who had read the initial blog posts.

The goal was to comfort Christians where they were—to help people believe the mundane stuff matters.

And I had two people in mind as I wrote. Others moved in and out of my mind and were a huge help, but these two held my hand the whole way. They were ideals, working like muses.

The first is a stay-at-home mom. She does the same chores every day. She fixes meals not always appreciated. She changes diapers, does laundry, dusts, does homework, sweeps and heals sick kids, world without end. And then she goes to church and hears sermons, or is recommended books that make her sick with

worry that she is not doing enough. She is no one in particular. I didn't choose her to be in the forefront of my mind because she is to be idolized. It would be more truthful to say this picture of a mom chose me.

So, she was with me the whole way.

But there was another. A man, stuck. Stuck in a job that feels small—a job making him feel small. He is not embarrassed of his job so much as just miserable. On Monday, he can barely stay awake because he's been awake since 3:45 dreading the day ahead. Sometimes he is so full of anger at his plight.

He believes the gospel but has no idea what that means for him in this dead-end job. He also reads books and hears sermons. And they make his work feel even smaller.

Actually, if we want to be specific about it, he is a banker. When I wrote this book, I didn't know what bankers did, so all I could picture is a guy working in the drive-thru trying to balance his drawer. It sounded miserable to me. It was a picture of unimaginable frustration.

And I wanted this guy to believe in the God of the mundane. I wanted this guy to see this is the work of those who have the Spirit in full. I was desperate to make him see it is not only the work of missionaries and ministers that matters. I wanted him to believe his work is inherently spiritual and good—even if he hates it each and every moment.

But I'm not a pastor anymore. And this morning, my boss made it clear I would be training to do something that drives fear right through me like arrows. Though hired to ride a desk, I will be trained to be a bank teller when one is needed.

This is but the latest wave in a never-ending rhythmic tide of disappointment. And it feels like the belly of a whale sometimes.

At other times I can barely hold it together. I'm forty years old and often want to cry like a schoolgirl because I am miserable with my job. And I'm not very good at it.

Did you know you have to be able to count to be a banker?

You laugh, but I was the last one to learn long division in fourth grade and I still have not caught up.

Is it Providence that makes me need the very thing I labored for others to see? Whatever you call it, I'm having to hang onto my own words. If I over-analyze myself here, it feels like arrogance. But it's really very humbling, swallowing the medicine you wanted to convince everyone was good for them.

It don't go down so easy.

Listen, I wrote the book, but that is no indication of this being easy for me to accept. There are so many days I feel abandoned and cast off. It's hard most days for me to think of my work as inherently good, and as significant in the kingdom as the work I did as a pastor.

But even though I secretly harbor a deep enjoyment of painting my job as filled daily with horror, there are moments of radiant light.

For every customer who tells me I am not good at what I do and I should go back to doing what I did before (that really happened) there is an Alyssa.

Alyssa, 20 years old, came in one afternoon, not long before closing. She had a negative balance and looked like her world was ending. Because it was. She had a check to deposit, but much of the funds were going to be eaten up by the negative balance.

She whispered, “I suck at life.”

In an effort to stall while trying to think of a solution, I asked some questions about school. She reluctantly told me she needed to be able to pay the co-pay before her cancer treatment. Earlier in the year she had been given the diagnosis.

Before she was done telling me the details, we were both in tears. I ceased being a banker and instead I was talking with a young person again like I did so often as a pastor. Stalling worked; I came up with a solution and she left with promises of prayer and her money.

I called to check back in on her after she told me she would be done. She was not able to talk yet but called me back the next day. She sounded even sadder. They had now found tumors in her lymph nodes and chest.

*Silence.* The kind of silence that has the weight of the world fixed squarely upon its shoulders.

She then told me how she would have to quit her job. She had already given up a cheerleading scholarship. (The way she told me this had the tone of a death knell.) She knew she was basically getting terrible news. I promised to pray for her and check in again soon.

Three days later she came in with another paycheck. She made a beeline to my office. “I don’t need anything today. I could’ve gone through the drive-thru, but I wanted to tell you that the tumors are benign!”

And so we both teared up again. That was just over a week ago. I’m having more good days at work now since that happened.

I’ve stared down into the faux-wood grain of my desk and cursed the moment I ever sat down behind it. I’ve had so many days where I was on the verge of emotionally losing control, I had to leave my desk and go look at myself in the mirror and let my gray hairs remind me I am a grown man. My tie was a noose and my nametag felt like a guilty verdict.

But since that day, I’ve seen my desk as now a place where holy things can happen. It’s often felt like an altar—a place of sacrifice—but working with Alyssa confirmed it: My tie felt like a clerical collar. My name tag, a sign of favor.

The more I’ve thought about Alyssa and her story, the more I’ve realized how much I would not have wanted to be anywhere else.

I've pretty much lived on Monster.com and other sites over the past six months. I've talked to people about other jobs. I've interviewed, and the only reason I'm still where I am is that no one really wants a pastor who smells like he's been in the belly of a whale. Or I'm not qualified.

Whichever.

But it all feels like Providence now. Banks are supposed to be cold halls of greed and indifference. And I can see why: it's all about numbers. But I was able to cut across the expectations with words.

And as I've looked back, there have been more stories like Alyssa's. There is the mother whose son was stealing from her account to buy drugs between stints in prison. So I'm still counseling parents about their kids.

And I was able to instill some hope into some newlyweds who had too much dreadful expectation heaped on them since exchanging vows. No one had told them the good news of marriage till I did.

I've sat in front of a man whose wife had asked for a divorce the day before.

Once I asked a mom and son why they had come into the branch, only to find out Dad/ex-husband had killed himself the day before.

I didn't handle all these situations perfectly. And sometimes I may have failed to represent Christ as some might want me to. So I'm not bragging on myself.

## Introduction

I'm bragging on the mundane and the God thereof.

I'm 40, I have a master's degree, and now I'm having to learn how to be a bank teller. In other words, I've found myself right smack dab in the middle of the very experience I wanted to speak into. And after almost a year of having to drink deeply of the draught I once only prescribed, I believe more than ever: *there is a God of the mundane.*





# The Question of the Mundane

*We often let the big ideas, the majestic vistas of salvation, the grand visions of God's work in the world, and the great opportunities for making an impact in the name of Jesus distract us from taking with gospel seriousness the unglamorous ordinary.*

– Eugene Peterson<sup>4</sup>

*My life is so damn mundane.*

– One of 10,000 voices on Twitter

A young mother spends yet another morning scraping last night's mac-and-cheese off the linoleum. A barista rises at four a.m. and slogs into work so everyone else can get coffee on their way. Behind a uniform desk, a well-starched banker sits and analyzes numbers. Underneath a luxury SUV, a mechanic reaches for greasy tools while Springsteen plays in the background. A room full of third-graders challenges

the wit, patience, and energy of a young teacher. A father has a lightsaber battle with his son. Comfortably dressed, a librarian rises and points to the section where books on how to pass the GED are correctly shelved. Outside of an empty house, a real-estate agent is waiting for an eager family. A nurse delivers medicine to sometimes-thankful patients. A graphic designer stares at a screen, dreaming for the sake of others. A mother gets up to change another diaper.

And I wonder:

*Is there a God of the mundane?*

As I look around the landscape of evangelicalism (the world I find myself in) the mundane escapes notice. The ordinary is given lip service but overlooked like the garnish on a steak dinner. What the evangelical church really wants is something as large as God Himself—captivating personalities up front, stage-worthy performances every Sunday, humble miracle-workers in the pews, and an endless windfall for the balance sheets.

The call is to do something big. I've sat on the edge of my front-row seat and heard the call thundered from pulpits. And I've been the one thundering:

“Change the world,” I can hear myself crying out. “Change your world. Change the world of someone. Anyone. Sell everything. Sell anything. Give it away. Do something crazy. Be radical. Make people stand up and notice. Take a risk. Jesus moved from heaven

to earth and gave up his life and yet you—you just go about your daily life.”

All too easily I can hear myself burdening the room with words, phrases, and ideas I’ve heard elsewhere:

“Your days should be blood-earnestly marked by an urgent, nerve-twisting love for people you have never known,” I might say. “And if you truly loved them you would join the missions team’s trip at the expense of your vacation to know them. If you loved God, you would do it. And if you really *believed-believed*, you would go and stay. You should want to go. It should be hard to stay where you are in the comfort of where you are.”

My own voice, like a lance, slashes through the darkness in every soul before me:

“You worship,” I berate them. “And then what do you do? You rest. You huddle in your house with your spouse and kids. You eat. You drink. You make love. Go to your kid’s games. Go out with friends. You have clean sheets, clean stainless-steel refrigerators and clean water. You change nothing while millions die in poverty. Each week is a brick used to build the house of a wasted, ordinary existence.”

I’ve heard all of it flail in my own head and lash against my ribs, leaving sourness in my stomach no medicine can aid. Worse yet, similar words—if not these very ones—I turned into whips with which to

waken the consciences of those sitting before me. It never felt right, but it preached well.

No lie. I used to preach and teach like this. And if I didn't use the exact words and draw the precise conclusions, I let the listener fill them in like some twisted religious Mad Lib.

But then I began to ask questions. The inconvenient ones.

Really? Is this the normal Christian life? Is God sitting around waiting for each and every believer to do something monumental? Is this the warp and woof of the New Testament? Are the lifestyles of the apostles the standard for the persons in the pew? Are the first-century believers the standard?

Is this our God?

In the economy of God, do only the times when we are doing something life-changing have any spiritual cachet with Him?

Does He look over the mundane work of the housewife, only to see the missions trip she may go on?

So I wondered. I wondered about the great majority I have known and know, the great majority living fairly ordinary lives.

Is there a God, for instance, for those who are not changing anything but diapers? Is there a God for those who simply love their spouse and pour out rarely appreciated affection on their children day after day? Is there a God for the mom who spends what feels like

God-forsaken days changing diapers and slicing up hot dogs? Is there a God for the man who hammers out a day's work in obscurity for the love of his wife and kids? Is there a God for just and kind employers? Generous homemakers? Day-laborers who would look at a missions trip to Romania like it was an unimaginable vacation?

Is there a God for the middle-class mom staving off cancer, struggling to raise teenagers, and simply hoping both Mom and Dad keep their job? Is there a God for the broken home with a full bank account but an empty bed? Is there a God for grown children tending to the health of their aged parents?

Is there a God who delights in the ordinary existence of the unknown faithful doing unknown work? Is there a God of grace for those who live out their faith everywhere but do not want to move anywhere?

Is there a God for those who have bigger homes than me? More money than me? Nicer cars than me? Better health than me?

Is there a God for the mundane parts of life, the small moments? Is there a God of kind smiles, good tips, and good mornings? Is there a God of goodbye hugs and parting kisses? What about firm, truthful handshakes and grasps of frail fingers in sanitized hospital rooms?

Does God care about the forgotten, mundane moments between the sensational, those moments

never remembered? Or are those just spiritually vacuous moments, ones for which there is no God?

Is there a God of the mundane?

Does this God I worship care about mundane people and moments?

I'm not crazy. I know there are others asking the same question. But it felt like the lonely question we ask into the night sky where no one will answer. And when we can finally ask it, the comfort is not in the answer so much as wishing we could hear others asking the same question. If misery loves company, a company of wondering would have been nice.

But I kept looking into that night sky. It began looking less empty with all its stars and planets and blank blackness. And the question, hanging there, caught in the beauty of the firmament, yearned for an answer echoing throughout the constellatory.

Perhaps I should give full disclosure. None of these thoughts are of the disinterested sort. I need to answer the question for myself. I've already answered the question before it: can I while away my days in obscurity? And so, answering in the affirmative and consigning myself to a mundane existence, I now ask: is there a God of grace for me and my work—the days that turn into weeks, into months and years, never distinguished but in need of a new calendar?

Should I want something bigger? Will God be for me then?

Is God for my wife, whose days are full of conversations with children, repeated trips to the store, dirty diapers, floors that have to be swept and clothes to be washed constantly? Is there a God for her when one of our three children is sick, confused, and full of tears pouring out of wide-eyed sockets and mixing with her own? Is there a God for her as she slowly moves away from youth and into a frame she can hardly believe is her own?

Should she want more? Will He only be her God if she does something “big”?

As I write this, I’m a pastor. And the question looms large. It hangs in the air where I study, and it hangs over the pulpit. The question stretches out into the pew where it steals away into suburban homes and places of work and various schools. It breaks into bedrooms and boardrooms.

Is there a God for the mundane parts of our lives? For our mundane lives? Is there a God who makes sense of the life lived between the seismic and the extraordinary? Between the missions trips? In between the joy and the pain? Is there a God for the meantime in a culture drunk on the weekend’s promises?

I think there is.





# The Answer of the Mundane

*The obviously well-kept secret of the “ordinary” is that it is made to be a receptacle of the divine, a place where the life of God flows. –Dallas Willard<sup>5</sup>*

My goal is not to call anyone *mundane*. I just assume you’ve done it yourself.

I write all this under the assumption that everyone at some point stops what they are doing, frustrated. They put their face in the palms of tired hands. Or they look up. And they ask, “Does this matter?”

Does my work and life and all its parts matter at all? To God? To anyone?

It happens after reading a magazine article about a celebrity. It happens after years of doing the same thing day after day after day. And it could be happening right now because you just got back from lunch with a friend whose life is exciting, comparatively speaking.

Or it happens after a sermon.

My hope is for you to read, on every page of this little book, that there is a God of the mundane. So allow me to answer all the questions of the first chapter in hopes at least one will find its mark.

*Yes:* there is a God for those who are not changing anything but diapers. There is a God for those who simply love their spouse and pour out unappreciated affection on their children, day after day. There is a God for the mom who spends her days scraping the trampled mac-and-cheese off the kitchen floor. There is a God for the man who hammers out a day's work in obscurity for his wife and kids. There is a God for the just and kind employers. There is a God for generous homemakers, generous with prayers and dollars and time. There is a God for day-laborers looking at a missions trip to the far corners of the world like an unimaginable vacation.

There is a God for the middle-class people staving off cancer, struggling to raise teenagers, and simply hoping against hope they keep their jobs. There is a God for the broken home with a full bank account but an empty bed. There is a God for those children tending to the health of their aged parents.

There is a God delighting in the ordinary existence of the unknown faithful doing unknown work. There is a God of grace for those who live out their faith everywhere but do not want to move anywhere.

And there is even a God for those who have bigger homes, more money, nicer cars, and better health than me.

And yes, there is a God of the mundane parts of life, the small moments. There is a God of kind smiles, good tips, and good mornings. There is a God of goodbye hugs and parting kisses. A God of firm handshakes. A God of grasping, frail fingers in hospital rooms.

There is a God of all the forgettable moments between the sensational and the never-remembered. These are not spiritually vacuous moments for which there is no God.

There is a God for those pastors who while away in mundane work: for those whose days turn into weeks, months, years, only distinguished by the need for a new calendar. There is a God for the mundane moments of ministry.

There is a God for those like my wife, whose days are full of trying conversations with children, repeated trips to the store for clean diapers, floors that have to be swept and clothes needing to be washed, world without end. There is a God when our children are sick, confused, and full of tears over a lost sock. There is a God for wives, for women as they move away from youth and into a frame they can hardly believe is their own.

There is a God for those with mundane lives.

There is a God who can make sense of the life lived between the seismic and the extraordinary, between the joy and the pain. Yes. There is a God for the mean-times in a culture drunk on the weekend's promises.

This is an encouraging answer.

Encouraging because most of us live very mundane lives. Encouraging because so much of our life is full of the mundane.

We wake up in the morning. Shower. Dress in last year's fashions. Eat the same breakfast we did the day before. Kiss our significant other. Kiss the kids. Go to work or stay home for the work that never ends. We have supper. Watch some TV. Do it again.

Though we enjoy vacations and short seasons of excitement, we for the most part have ordinary days. And expect to for the rest of them.

We will not be famous. We will not be stars in our culture's glittering nights. And though many of us have drunk deeply of a celebrity-saturated world, we live a life apart. Oh, we want to be famous, known, and revered. But that is not the reality. The reality is no one will write books about us. And outside of our families, we will be forgotten.

This sounds terrible but only because fame—which was never ours—has obscured our view of what reality is. And what is that? That we are part of that not-so-exclusive group of men and women throughout history known as *everyone else*.

Christians are not immune to the problem of being mundane and seeing it as a problem. We have breathed in the same fumes as the rest. Our hearts burn for our deeds to be noticed and celebrated. We want to do something big and have it thrust into cyberspace for all to experience. Those who follow the Man of no reputation<sup>6</sup> pine for one, resumé at the ready.

There are dark and dusty corners of our heart that will fight tooth-and-nail against ever being known to exist. The reason is easy to see. We think the small, mundane, ordinary things we do each and every day are worth nothing before God because they are worth nothing before the gods of this world.

But even the famous cannot escape. And they will try just like us. They will leverage all their money and talent and influence to burst the bonds of the mundane. But they are also bound, as tight as we are.

We may envy their lifestyles. But if we were to look closely, we would see much that could only be called mundane. And while we are trying to escape the mundane, many of the famous desire more of it.

It is encouraging that there is a God of the mundane, because our lives are just that—*mundane*. This is good news for those who have tired of trying to live fantastically. And this is spectacular news for those who have been tempted to think their lives escape the notice of God because they are decidedly not spectacular.

It is encouraging because the mundane is reality. We may flirt with greatness, but the fact is—for the Christian and non-Christian—ordinary is the divine order of the day for the vast majority of us. Kids, bills, coupons, cable, home repair, gas in the tank, church attendance, inexpensive pleasures, discount shopping, and family reunions are what we are made of.

Sure, there are explosive interruptions—wondrous and terrible—which are inevitable. Indeed, how many of the stories we love are tales of the ordinary man or woman whose life is changed by extraordinary events and nothing is the same again? Prince Charming rides in. A goddess steps out of the wood. All is terrifically unhinged.

But for the most part, all is mundane. Ordinary. Thankfully, there is a God behind it all.

## The Apostle Paul or the Person in the Pew?

*The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. – George Eliot<sup>7</sup>*

Sometimes I envy those who are reading the Bible for the first time. It's all unfamiliar virgin territory, fresh and new. The world is under their feet, but it moves as they read, and the heavens open in terrible glory. They get lost in the meaning of the stories, and teachings, and songs, and poems, and prophecies. And they know they are lost. (The way I feel when reading James Joyce.) Knowing we are lost is helpful. Humility comes like a friend and we then allow ourselves to ask for help.

I've been reading all these bizarre and beautiful stories and teachings and songs and poems and proph-

ecies my whole life long. They mark my life as scars do on proud old veterans. They are so familiar that I cannot escape many of them. Without any help they rush to the scene so I can make sense of everything. And while familiarity has not led to contempt, it has led to other problems.

I hardly ever feel lost.

I hardly ever get to be helpless when I read the Bible. Almost forty years of hearing it, a biblical studies degree, and a Master of Divinity will conspire to make one proud. It is good that the Bible has been my lifelong companion. It is *not* good to think I'm never lost in my reading it.

This lesson was taught to me in a particularly painful way about a year before I wrote this.

For as long as I can remember I had been reading the letters to the churches in the New Testament and missing something. I missed it as a young man wanting to enter vocational ministry, and I missed it as a seminary student. I sadly missed it as a pastor. Sometimes we may miss things because they are hidden. But we seem to always miss much because we see it every day.

I missed the obvious: the apostles are writing to normal people.

Most of them are nameless. They are Jew and Gentile, yes. But they are also *not* apostles. And most are not pastors. They are carpenters, farmers, traders,



sailors, fishermen, shepherds, guards. They are mothers and fathers and children. Compared to the life of an apostle, their lives are probably mundane. These are ordinary men and women believing an extraordinary story.

They are not the apostle Paul, or Peter, or any of the other apostles immortalized in the pages of sacred writ. They are ordinary people who have huddled in someone's home, drank their wine, ate their bread, and listened to the Holy Spirit through the words of an apostle. And then they went home. And they got up the next morning and lived a normal life, probably to the end of their days.

And now, *poof!* They are forgotten.

My guess? Most of them lived out the rest of their lives after coming to faith with the most exciting thing in their lives being when they believed and aligned themselves with Christ and His people. They kept on living where they were and making a living as they did before they believed. They lived normal lives. Only more so.

They listened to Paul's teaching, learned from him, and, in faith, stayed where they were after he left.

All of this should have been obvious to me, but it wasn't. For years I read and thought and then taught as if Paul was the standard for those I was teaching. "Look at Paul and his singular devotion to Christ," I would implore them. And then it hit me. The name-

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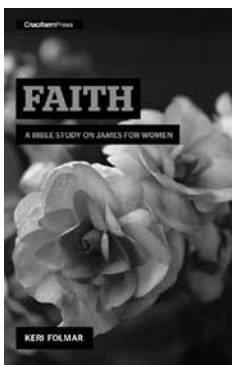
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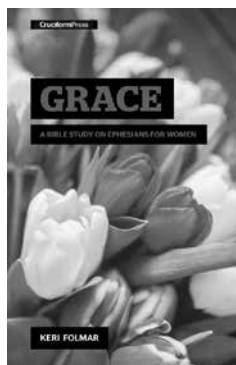
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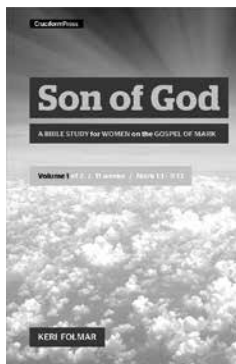
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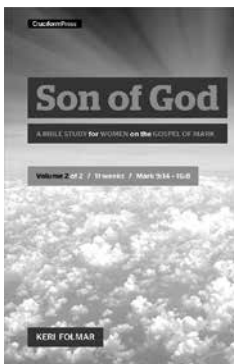
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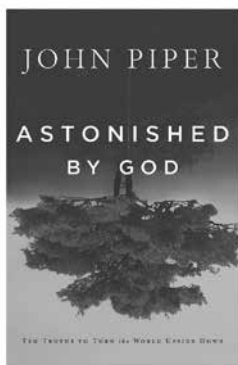
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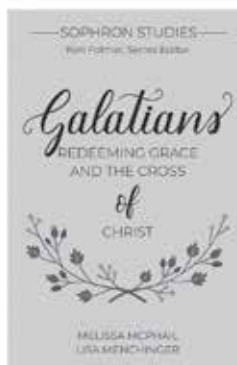


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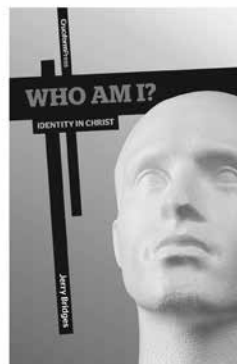


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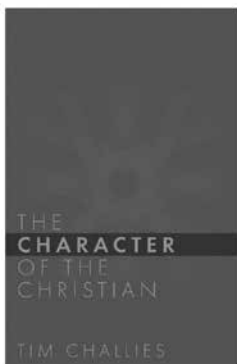


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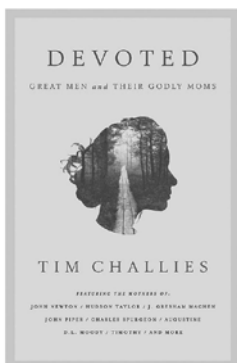


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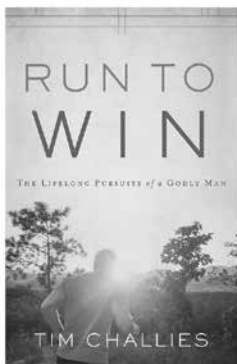


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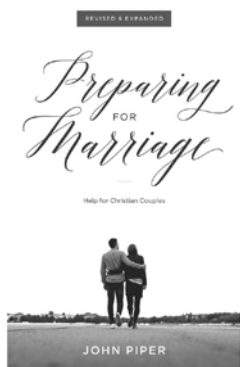


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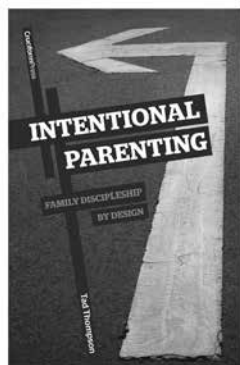


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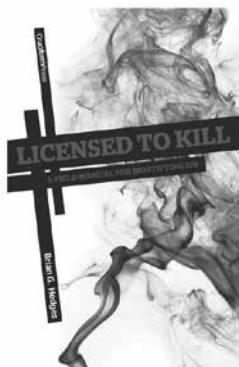
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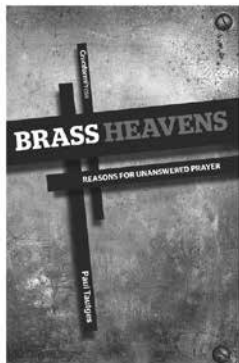


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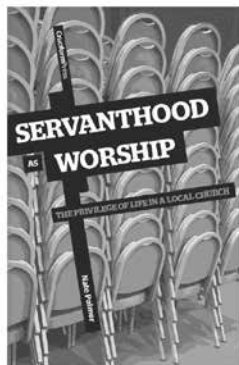


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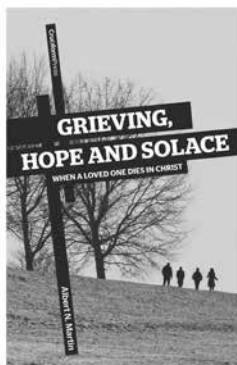


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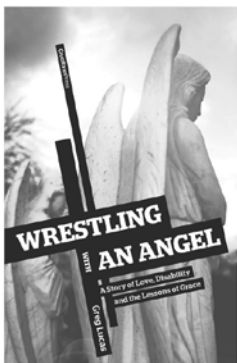


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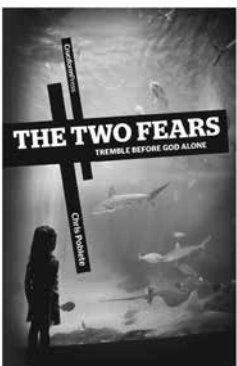
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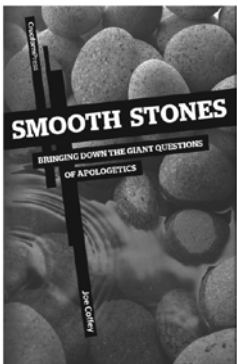
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