CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP

Your Story Living Submissively: The Glory of the Mundane

GOAL OF THE STUDY

Many Christians might hesitate to describe their Christian walk as boring. It is probably equally true that not many would be ready to declare their daily life as significant and meaningful. Ordinary things like going to church, saying table prayers, and trying to live according to the Ten Commandments may seem superficial and insignificant; with familiarity and repetition, the meaningfulness of these acts drains away as well. Christians seem to act as if simply doing what God calls them to do is not vital or meaningful. Receiving the Lord's Supper, visiting a grieving friend, praying for your pastor, and talking to your neighbor about the reasons for the hope you have, seem trivial and devoid of meaning compared to building a house for the disadvantaged, traveling overseas to teach non-Christians a little English and a little about Jesus, or investing a day in a community service project. The quest for significance and meaning too easily eventuate in a disinterested and dismissive attitude toward everyday Christian life. The goal of this lesson is to address and correct this errant thinking.

ANSWERS

1 There is nothing particularly significant about the selected texts; others could be added or substituted. Each chosen story can be read in a variety of ways, but the intent is to glean the most obvious points:

> David was watching sheep.
> Gideon was threshing wheat.
> Hannah was being a good wife and mother.
> Elisha was being an exceptional farmer.
> Anna was using her status as a widow to live a life of prayer.

It is true that according to God's plan, each of these people in varying degrees was catapulted into events and situations far from ordinary; but when the call came, each was living an unexceptional life doing what he or she had been given to do.

2 A common theme is that God took the initiative to inject something atypical into the routine of life for these five individuals. None went looking for something to occur, and each appears to have been content to do the tasks at hand without the intrusion of some new thing.

3 There is clearly a common theme in God's revelation: God's ways are not man's ways. God delights in making choices and electing people that by the world's standards are not worth a second look. God does not honor the exceptional, but the ordinary and the faithful . . . those who simply do what they have been given to do and take no notice of the judgments and evaluations of others. Extraordinary status is never an achievement of humans, but always the gift of God.

4 We are taught that the sacred is what relates to God, and the things of God, while the secular is whatever is bound to things of this world. It is the distinction between what is godly and what is worldly. If the whole world and everything in it is created by God and exists by God's will, it makes little sense to maintain an artificial division between what is sacred and what is secular. Everything belongs to God and is therefore inherently sacred. To accept this idea is to learn a fuller definition of what is holy and sacred. To be holy is simply to be rightly related to God and his will. When creation is rightly ordered toward the Creator, it is holy.

ANSWERS cont.

5 Essentially, Samuel is telling the newly anointed king that as the object of God's favor, he is free to do whatever he chooses, and that choice will receive God's blessing. While this might seem like carte blanche for a licentious debauch or a self-promoting agenda of acquisition, when lived in the context of faith, the will of God is always at work to norm and check the actions and to guide them within God's will and design. In other words, there is freedom within the parameters of God's law. Seen this way, there is little that calls for adjustment from the standpoint of New Testament revelation.

6 Ecclesiastes is not an easy book, of course, but the text should be understood not as despair or a lack of faith, but as an expression of a down-to-earth approach to life for those living rightly related to God and his truth. Life is short, so enjoy the gifts that God gives—especially the ordinary, everyday gifts of life; and do whatever work you find with the confidence that it is what God put you here to do. Again, within the parameters of justifying faith and obedience to God's will, there is tremendous liberty to live as one chooses.

7 This is the point of potent application. The wonder of the text as advice for Christian living is the remarkable freedom believers have to choose the things they do. "Whatever your hand finds to do," indicates the immediacy and the individuality of the choice. For Luther, this text and I Samuel 10:7 express the doctrine of vocation in which a Christian is free to serve the creation around him in a number of ways—all of which can be seen in a life lived within God's purposes. So when trying to decide "God's will" for where to go college, what career to pursue, what job offer to take, or what person to marry, the answer may well be: so long as the choice does not violate God's law, "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."

8 Doing "whatever your hand finds to do," by necessity, will take place within the created world. It will be quite material. It will be worldly in the best sense of the word, and will therefore be mundane. There is nothing boring about pursuing with all your might what you have been given to do. Meeting new challenges as a celebration of God's gift of the mundane will ever hold boredom at bay. It is important to adjust our expectations from the "significant and meaningful extraordinary event," and to see instead the profound meaning in living an ordinary life from God's perspective.

9 The "big things" (speaking in tongues, prophesying, miraculous faith, even martyrdom) are nothing if they are not rooted in an ordinary life of love that does whatever needs to be done for the sake of the neighbor. Thus, Christians learn to live their mundane vocations with zeal since it is in ordinary life that we live the way that God has called us to live.

10 The main focus of this lesson should have immediate application within the lives of participants. This is not theory, but reality that demands adjustments in attitudes and actions. Rather than chasing big, splashy events with supposed meaning and significance, participants should see their ordinary lives in a fresh way that celebrates each day's labor as meaningful and heavy with eternal significance.