

PREFACE

In the Gospels and Acts, men of God were lead, gifted and empowered by God to do mighty works. We read in amazement at their devotion to Christ and dedication to their ministry for the Lord. With signs, wonders and miracles that authenticated their words, men's hearts were changed and the first-century world felt the impact. Then we think, "Why not me? I want that identical experience, walking intimately with God and making a significant difference in the world. Why can't I be like the Apostles?" Before you set sail for parts unknown to change wherever that place might be, take a look at some of those men of God in different settings. Maybe that will provide insight and a better understanding of the normal Christian life. Like you and me, their life experiences did not always represent a continual "Christian high." They had problems and concerns like those we also encounter. Can it be that the Christian life is somewhat more of a normal, seemingly mundane, experience? I do not mean dull but certainly not always full of excitement, oozing spiritual energy.

Paul's Normal Christian Life

Take a look at various areas of Paul's life. Obviously his ministry as an Apostle of Christ affected the world, but what about the times he encountered conflicts, disappointments, and people problems. Doesn't that sound similar to your normal and everyday Christian life? The hands that performed extraordinary miracles (Acts 19:1) were the same hands that supported him financially as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3;

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20:34-35). Needless to say Paul had deadlines to meet and grumpy customers to satisfy. He also had questions about God's purposes. Not once but three times Paul requested God to be delivered from his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-10). Nevertheless, the thorn, which remained, was for a reason. Time and time again Paul experienced conflicts with people. He was stoned because people didn't like and rejected his message (Acts 14:19). While being stoned certainly does not make for a regular day, it was not exciting for Paul either. It was not only Israel's religious leaders with whom Paul had conflicts; he experienced friendly fire as well. He had to defend his apostleship to some in the Corinthian church (2 Cor 10-12). Even with Barnabas' prodding, trying to persuade otherwise, Paul refused to allow John Mark on the second missionary journey since he deserted them on the first one (Acts 15:36-40). Resultantly, Paul and Barnabas separated. Paul even confronted Peter for his inconsistency as Peter separated himself from fellowship with Gentile Christians when Jewish believers from Jerusalem came to Antioch (Gal 2:11-14).

Your Normal Christian Life

Like Paul, you must deal with customer demands as well as other workplace and home responsibilities. On occasion you desperately seek to understand God's purpose for your life. You also have had to make troubling decisions that affected your relationships with family, friends and co-workers. Those are some examples of the ordinary daily experiences of every Christian. While typically portrayed otherwise, victorious Christian living is not an everyday, all day, exciting walk with Jesus.

Ordinary is normal when it comes to the Christian life. Nevertheless, the routine of everyday life becomes more than commonplace only when we take our eyes off ourselves and we reach out in service to God and to those around us. Authentic Christian living is ordinary living in an extraordinary manner—loving others rather than self. Instead of seeking a spiritual experience, Christians are to live lives of faithful obedience. Jesus said, "If you wish to enter into life [that which is abundant], keep

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the commandments” (Matt. 19:17; cf. John 10:10).¹ Possessing eternal life is a gift through faith; experiencing abundant life is serving others by obedience to Christ. Then, ordinary becomes extraordinary.

Core of Concern

Believers who are committed to Christ desperately desire to experience the presence of God in their lives. Searching to fill that void can unfortunately lead to seeking dependence on the Spirit’s supposed empowerment both for overcoming our inclination to sin and for living out our faith in Christ. Desperately trying to grasp hold of a lasting spiritual experience, most lose perspective of authentic Christian living and gravitate to embrace a “let-go-and-let-God” understanding, relying on the Spirit’s power to produce Christlikeness in and through their lives.

This book addresses this misunderstanding and offers a way of escape in order to truly experience genuine biblical living. *Authentic Christianity is ordinary living in an extraordinary manner. So, ESCAPE to experience biblical reality!*

Author’s Note

If in your Christian life you are *not experiencing* either (1) frustration in trying to keep a list of “got to” rules to please God or (2) frustration in waiting for the Spirit to produce His fruit in your life, then this book is *not for you*. On the other hand, if disappointment is your experience this book has good news for you. But a warning from the author— This isn’t a warm, fussy, feel-good book. It’s content is a paradigm shift in thinking from what is typically taught. As such, explanations and applications of numerous biblical texts pertaining to the Christian life are addressed and developed. Each chapter covers at least one of

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the multifaceted topics in the mistaken belief of “empowered living.” Extensive development of the subject is necessary in order to confront this erroneous teaching that continues to be perpetrated in the Church. Yet, it will be well worth your consideration since it will provide an *Escape from spiritual frustration* as you look to the biblical pattern for experiencing “abundant living.”

