

# Mundane Life

Happy New Year, first day of 2023. Isn't it an advantage that we can see the ball drop in New York at 10pm instead of midnight, and catch a couple hours more of sleep? I've had a year to write this sermon, and I don't know how Pastor Matthew does it in a week. I'm up front again church family, so that means the message this morning is going to range far and wide through the Bible. I like using a lot of verses, because it is easier for me when God writes the words. I also should thank my editor for turning my web of connected thoughts into a more linear talk.

Today I want to talk to you about mundane life. Let's start with a definition.

mun·dane

/ˌmənˈdān/

adjective

1. lacking interest or excitement; dull.

"seeking a way out of his mundane, humdrum existence"

2. of this earthly world rather than a heavenly or spiritual one.

"the boundaries of the mundane world"

Similar:

boring

tedious

monotonous

unexciting

uneventful

unremarkable

repetitive

routine

ordinary

It seemed right to start the year talking about everyday, ordinary life. Often we like to focus on doing "big" things for God, doing something extraordinary in the new year. But most of us will be living normal, mundane lives in 2023. The question is, how do we live faithfully, how do we include "being Christian" in our mundane, daily lives.

Let's look at what the scriptures say are some hallmarks of a faithful life. These our goals, the ideals that we want to achieve.

Philippians 1:27 says, "As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that

you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.”

Hebrews 12:1 encourages: “Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us.”

Galatians 6:9 “Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up.”

Our passage in Colossians tells us, Col 3:17 “And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Similarly, 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.”

Romans 12:17

Finally, 1 Corinthians 16:13

Wow, that's a heavy list. Be so good that the people gossip about your goodness. Lay aside every sin, pushing hard for godliness. Don't get tired of working for good, give thanks in all things, and do it all with love. Be a steadfast peace lovers, not looking to correct others' wrongdoings.

Phew. Well that paints a pretty full picture right there. These verses show us the ideals we should strive for. They are not the basis of our salvation, or a way of earning God's approval. Rather they are the overflow of a life with Jesus.

He is not looking to weigh us down with this list. Jesus said his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30), compared to the Pharisees who tie up great burdens for the normal man to carry.(Matthew 23:4) They did this by adding more laws and more ways to measure individual righteousness. Righteousness is not to be measured, because it is *not mine* that matters. Christ's righteousness is credited to me.

So let's continue looking at what the Bible says about ways to practically live out these ideals. Opportunities to practice these marks of our discipleship abound:

Deuteronomy 15:11 For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, 'Open your hand willingly to your poor and needy brother in your land.'

There will always be poor who could use a helping hand. As long as human nature persists, there will always be inequality. But each inequality is an opportunity to show love. Look at what Jesus said:

Matthew 25:37-40 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?' "And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

God takes kindness and mercy shown to others as kindness and mercy shown to Himself. Let's look at another example from Jesus, whom we are to imitate.

Matthew 9:10-13 "While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Now when he heard this, he said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 at the Pharisees. This is pointing us back towards the heart of the matter. Mercy is God's heart, and He most delights in showing it to and through us. Do the lost people in our lives see us as safe and loving, as people they can turn to? Or do they see us judgmental and dismissive?

Luke 6:35

This applies to me as much as it applies to you. Be aware, help one person at a time. Like a gentle whisper, breathe life into those around you. Sometimes a person just needs someone to acknowledge that they are human, and to listen to their story. Do that, and maybe buy them some lunch. Often times I find I don't have a hand free to help, because I'm holding onto my comforts instead. I'm busy, preoccupied, and missing opportunities. How many of you would say the same? What is keeping you from being the tangible mercy and goodness of God to those around you?

Showing love to everyone around us would be easier if we could somehow get rid of our selfish nature. I'm looking forward to pastor Matthew getting to Romans 7 because it is such a picture of the struggle. It soothes me to see even Paul had this same struggle. He says in Romans 7:18-19 "For I know that nothing

good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. 19 For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.”

What we see in the scriptures and in our own lives is that while we want to live good lives that bring God glory, we often fall short because of our physical and spiritual limitations. There are more people that need help than we can reach. Suffering has complex causes that we can't solve with a dollar bill at the stop light or a single cup of coffee. We see such immense tasks that we cannot complete, that there is a temptation to throw up our hands and say, “Why even try?” There are so many things to do, and none of us can do everything.

Don't give up. Don't be dragged down by the snares of guilt or distraction. I'm not saying you have to be perfect, because I know that it is humanly impossible. Wouldn't it be amazing if we could be constantly tuned in to God's heart and be constantly helping ease the hurt all around us? But none of us can. We are finite beings. None of us can shoulder the whole world and all its suffering. I'm sure most of you have heard the story of the boy at the beach with the starfish. It's short, so I'll share for those who haven't.

One day a man was walking along the beach, when he noticed a boy hurriedly picking up and gently throwing things into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, “Young man, what are you doing?” The boy replied, “Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die.” The man laughed to himself and said, “Don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make any difference!”

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, “I made a difference to that one.”

Your scope of work is not the whole beach. Be aware of what is in your control. Own what you control, don't fret about what you cannot control.

Another obstacle that can pop up in our way is greed. Fight greed with generosity. If you think you need more than you have, go give something away and see how your life changes. For most of us, we have options. You give away your sneakers, and you still have boots and loafers, and probably some flip flops or sandals. You will see that life won't change much, because you have enough.

The need for more could also be from stress and not greed, from thinking there is not enough to cover what is ahead of you. Haste and stress is something that we get caught up in. We recognize that our resources are limited and so we rush to

get the results we want before we run out and have no more control.

In Matthew 6:34, Jesus tells us not to worry about our needs, because God will provide for us. Have you found though that just saying "stop worrying about it" does not help you stop worrying? It doesn't help for me, anyway. We have to take conscious action to fight fear, fight that haste and panic, with the idea of God's sovereignty. And not just the concept, but real life examples. Look at how those who went before us reminded themselves of God's protection and provision:

Joshua 4:20-22 "Then Joshua set up in Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan, and he said to the Israelites, "In the future, when your children ask their fathers, 'What is the meaning of these stones?' you should tell your children, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'"

1 Samuel 7:12 "Afterward, Samuel took a stone and set it upright between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, explaining, "The Lord has helped us to this point."

If you ask me about my career I will tell you about the tight timelines on my job changes, the small details that matched perfectly, how everything was orchestrated to avoid my poor negotiation skills because God is merciful. It's those stories that I hold onto tightly, those ebenezers from my own life that allow me to breathe again and not panic about where resources will come from and how it will all come together in the end.

Are you rushed and stressed? Worried about how to fit all the things that seem urgent and important in the short time you have each day? Fight it with a quiet time in the morning. It sounds wrong, to add another thing to do in an already full day. Put God first, and these things will be added to you. When I feel a need to accomplish my task list myself, under my own power, then I feel overwhelmed about all I have to do. That stress is fear, and that feeling of rushing to keep things together, is pride in my own skills and abilities. Fight pride with submission. Start each day with acknowledging that God is bigger, stronger, better, and actively protecting you. He has a plan that your life fits into. Not just a plan for your life, but a plan that is bigger than your life into which you fit.

Imposter syndrome is a common issue in my industry. Let's say some computer code I write is not doing what it should, and I've spent at least an hour staring at it trying to find why. My mind starts spiraling and I think, 'I'm going to fail at this task, and my boss is going to realize that I am not actually good at this, and I'll get fired, then I won't be able to pay the mortgage, and my life will crumble and my family will leave me and I will be abandoned and alone because that is all I

actually deserve... oh wait, that variable name is misspelled. The code works now. I'm fine. Everything is fine.' This fragile mindset is something I have seen in myself and several coworkers. It is so common in my industry that there are memes about it. It is prevalent across occupations and generations. It can be crushing and can trigger depression and anxiety. Fight it with the assurance that your worth is not reliant on your performance. That you are who God says you are and He is holding your life. It is a little easier for me when I remember what he has already done in my life. He's got me, and I can trust him. You can trust him too.

Psalms 27:14 says, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and courageous. Wait for the Lord."

The courageous thing here is to trust and be patient. Be smart, order your list and work on what you can, while you wait for God to resolve what you cannot work on.

Finally, be an encouragement to others however you can. The Apostle Peter writes, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." *1 Peter 4:7*

The gifts are not just the list of spiritual gifts; each of us is gifted in some way. The drummers up here are gifted with rhythm and coordination beyond my abilities. For those who have been here a long time, do you remember that painting of Habakkuk that Nate Potter did for pastor Don when Don was preaching through Habakkuk? That painting is one of Don's prized possessions, and it is another good example of using your gifts to love one another.

So how do we live out a daily faithfulness, since we are called to that rather than to grand gestures of the spectacular variety? And since we have realized our own weakness and limitations? We do it by repeated small faithfulness in the mundane areas of life.

How many of you remember the Karate Kid, or the remake where Jackie Chan teaches Kung Fu instead of Pat Morita teaching karate? Both have the training montage where you see them doing repetitive action to build muscle memory. Then at the end of the montage we discover that karate was in the action all the time. Paint the fence, wax on wax off, those are blocks to counter strikes. Take off the jacket, hang it up, those are redirecting an opponent.

The concept here is that when it is baked into your every day life, it is inseparable

from you. The Christian Life is not natural, it takes constant effort. There is momentum, and practice keeps it up and makes it easier. If you are only adding to that momentum on Sunday morning you will not be getting far, and the friction of life can stop you in your tracks some days. When you mop the floor for Jesus, it does not take special effort or special choice to stand your ground for Jesus or give credit to Jesus. Jesus is the karate, the kung fu, that you practice by living your life one action at a time. Let's unpack that a bit.

When you wipe off your kitchen counter, do you do it like I do? Take a damp rag, push it away from you up to the backsplash. Slide it over to a new column and pull it all the way down to push crumbs and larger bits on to the floor for vacuuming after. Then up again, over to a new column, and down to wipe this next line. Up, over, down. Up, over, down. What is that like? It's like the lamb's blood on the door posts of the first Passover. Up this post, across the top, down this post, marking this house as under protection so that judgement passes over. Up, over, down. As you wipe the counter, think of how you are marked in the blood, so that judgement passes over you. Up over, down. If you are more auditory than haptic or kinesthetic, then whisper a prayer of thanks for being paid for, and for judgement passing by, as you wipe the counter.

Vacuum the rug. Yeah, I know, you did that already last year. When you find time to do it again thank God that you do not need additional atonement as he paid once for all of it. Do the laundry, knowing that God is stronger than bleach on the sins staining you. You are washed whiter than snow, even if your socks are not. When you are tempted to grumble about packing lunches or running errands, use it as an opportunity to pray for the family and friends you are serving.

When I was working this out and writing it, there was an emotional response of "wow that is so cheesy even I cringe." I think that is part of the conditioning that our culture has put on us. But we need reminders. Find these connections, stand up your ebenezer stones, and have those reminders. Why cringe and turn away, when it is effective? Look at the attitude of David, which earned him the title "man after God's own heart".

In 2 Samuel 6:21 David said to his wife Michal, "[my dancing] was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel—I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

Because it was for the Lord God, and David was working with a mindset that said no other audience matters. That is what I need. That is what you need. We need

to stop putting personal image and dignity as higher priority than our God. So, grasshopper, wipe the counter. Vacuum the rug. Do the laundry. And have Jesus on your mind through it all.

Our God is real and He wants a personal relationship with you. He wants to meet you in the valleys and plateaus of life, not just the mountain tops. One of my brothers is exceedingly good at finding four leaf clovers, especially in our parent's yard. I learned that it is something he takes as a sign of God's provision. And since he made that connection, our personal God has made an abundance of four leaf clovers in Mom's yard. I think they are there because my brother lives in a small place with no yard of his own. Clover grows in patches, maybe 2 or 3 feet wide. Up here on the stage we could have 4 patches not touching each other, and my brother would find a 4 leaf clover in at least 2 of them. Because God is invested in that relationship and reminds my brother of it often. And now, seeing him find one when I can't because it is a personal thing to him, reminds me that our God is powerful, and personal, and watching over us all.

Be assured of God, taking His time to move the big things into place at the right time. He will pile on the little things and signs to remind you that the big things are coming in the right timing. We are so used to immediate cause and effect. We grow up learning the physical laws and limitations of life so that we can get a handle on adult life. God does not have those limits, and so it is difficult for us to include Him in our plans because we assume boundaries and limits in our plan making. But His ways are not our ways, His are bigger and better. So be assured and be steady. Walk your daily walk with your steps in the right order. Keep walking, keep faithful in the small things, and they will become the big things.

If it really is as simple as "do what you can, baby steps, love Jesus," why is life hard? Partly because of sin, partly because we live in hostile territory, mostly because we try to do it ourselves. We accept the guilt and blame from our inner legalist, that voice of the accuser. We accept the lie that if we try harder, we can be enough. We accept the priorities and the panic that the world is feeding us. And each of those push our eyes off Jesus. The guilt weighs us down, the striving forces tunnel vision, the panic requires frantic swiveling of our eyes to catch what will happen next.

We want progress, we want metrics, we want to pad our pride with our own accomplishments. We fall into the same trap as the Pharisees, tying up heavy loads of requirements and then trying to carry them. Our inner legalist is imagining that God wants perfect performance of the listed actions, which is humanly impossible. We can't. The good news is that we are not called to do this in our own power.

Remember 2 Corinthians 12:9 "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,

for my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me." We are equipped and enabled through a power much greater than our own.

In Hosea 6:6 God says, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."

He's not looking for sacrifice. He's not looking for your list of actions and accomplishments. He *is* looking for that glow of warmth that comes from understanding and reflecting His love. He *is* looking for that personal relationship with you. Our God is a personal God. He is not some corporate entity and we have to go through customer service to get some attention. He is immense enough that He can have individual dealings with each of us at the same time. These other things, like that heavy list at the start, will be natural actions of some one who is walking closely behind Jesus.

So, breathe. There is now no condemnation, nor performance requirement, nor measure to fill. God gave you a conscience, that gentle whisper. Breathe, and listen for it. Do what you can in the direction you know is good, and trust that however far you get in that direction is where God wants you. As they made a huge point of saying in Frozen 2, just do the next right thing. I am often amused when I can find a bigger spiritual truth in a non-spiritual place. Even when watching kids' movies we can be reminded of spiritual truths for our lives. I would also say, don't get paralyzed by trying to decide which is "the next right thing" and just do something that isn't a wrong thing. We climb the mountain not in leaps and bounds, but in small, steady, continuous steps. Let me leave you with Paul's admonition in Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."

Our God is real; keep Him in mind and do the little things. As Grace Church likes to say, we are here to help you get one step closer to Christ. That is all we are aiming for, one step at a time. So take a step. And then another, and another.