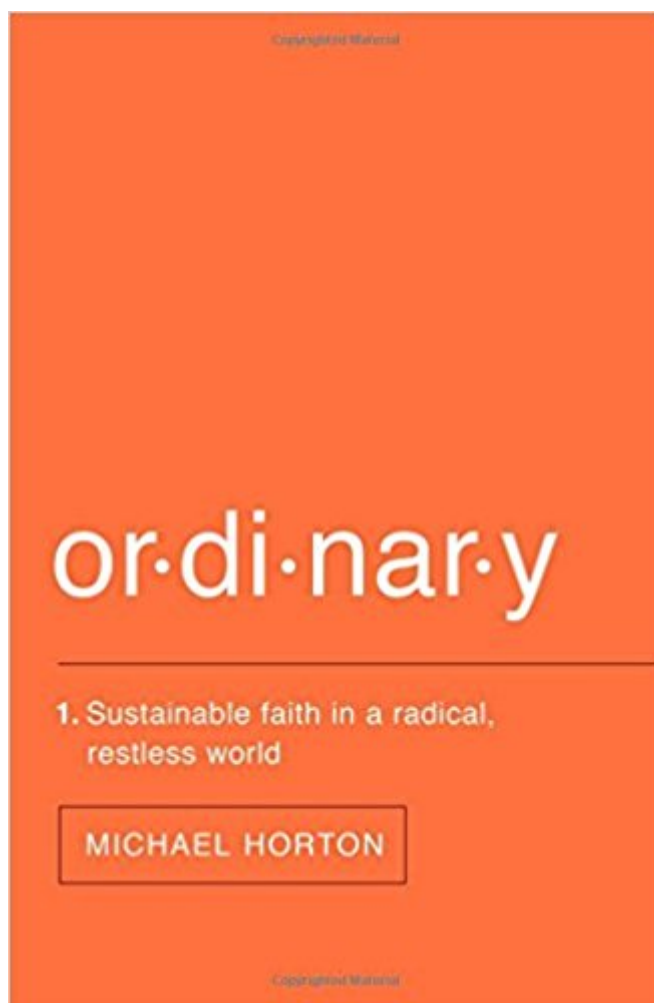


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Ordinary: Sustainable Faith In A Radical, Restless World



Synopsis

Radical. Crazy. Transformative and restless. Every word we read these days seems to suggest there's a "next-best-thing" if only we would change our comfortable, compromising lives. In fact, the greatest fear most Christians have is boredom—the sense that they are missing out on the radical life Jesus promised. One thing is certain. No one wants to be "ordinary." Yet pastor and author Michael Horton believes that our attempts to measure our spiritual growth by our experiences, constantly seeking after the next big breakthrough, have left many Christians disillusioned and disappointed. There's nothing wrong with an energetic faith; the danger is that we can burn ourselves out on restless anxieties and unrealistic expectations. What's needed is not another program or a fresh approach to spiritual growth; it's a renewed appreciation for the commonplace. Far from a call to low expectations and passivity, Horton invites readers to recover their sense of joy in the ordinary. He provides a guide to a sustainable discipleship that happens over the long haul—not a quick fix that leaves readers empty with unfulfilled promises. Convicting and ultimately empowering, *Ordinary* is not a call to do less; it's an invitation to experience the elusive joy of the ordinary Christian life.

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Customer Reviews

Michael Horton (PhD, DD) is Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California. Author of many books, including *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, he also hosts the White Horse Inn radio program. He lives

with his wife, Lisa, and four children in Escondido, California. ã ã

What's sensational about the ordinary? How can the average sell? What's extraordinary about the normal? Our culture, and the church that allows itself to be positioned by it, says "not much." Our culture is constantly looking for the next big thing, is always selling something new, and is ever lifting up the radical, epic, and revolutionary ways of life. Therefore the cry of some in the church today is that new, radical, epic, and revolutionary ways of ministry must rise to the top if the church is to be successful. Christians must become superstars by selling everything for Jesus, celebrity pastors need to lead the way to the next big thing, super (modern day) Apostles need to be over the top and always at it for Jesus, and contentment is to be shunned like the plague. As a result, tricked out, emergent, everything must change, hyper-missional, extraordinarily ambitious and audacious Christians and churches have become the *modus operandi* in much of North America. True, ordinary is simple, isn't flashy, has no bells and whistles, and doesn't sell. However, Michael Horton reminds us that the ordinary means of grace is precisely how Christ has worked for over 2,000 years to bring the extraordinary gifts of the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting to people bruised, beaten, and battered by their sins, and the sin of the world. Full of wisdom and ever winsome, Horton takes the reader through the challenge facing the North American Church today--letting the culture set the tone for the life and ministry of the church. He explores the over sensationalized church with all of its law oriented demands and juvenilization, and points her back to the beauty and the joy of the ordinary manner of her existence where the extraordinary message of the Gospel is routinely, regularly, and ordinarily proclaimed, delivered, and administered through Word and sacrament: "Why do we seem to think that churches need to imitate the perpetual innovation of Microsoft instead of the patient care of a good gardener? Chasing the latest fad for spiritual growth, church growth, and cultural impact, we eventually forget both how to reach the lost and how to keep the reached. The ordinary means of grace become yesterday's news. Like pay phones, so we are told by the emergent entrepreneurs, ordinary churches may still be around here and there, but nobody uses them. In olden days believers may have gathered for 'the apostles' teaching and the fellowship...the breaking of the bread and the prayers,' but that was before iPads. In past generations, Christ's fruit-bearing vines may have been tended with daily family disciplines of catechism, Bible reading, and prayer, but with my schedule? And to say that the apostolic method of church growth--in breadth as well as depth--is preaching, teaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and accountability to elders is likely to provoke the response: 'are you serious?' "(p.178-179). Horton insightfully tracks how the evangelical church has

gone from understanding the "ordinary" to demanding everything be "extraordinary;" how "ambition" was historically and biblically always a vice (and sin), but has not been elevated to a virtue; how "contentment" was always a biblical virtue but has now been made into a vice (of mediocrity); how the "contractual" American mentality and way of life has replaced the "covenantal" biblical mentality and way of life; and how "passing away" is the preferred mode of speaking rather than talking of the death and resurrection. All these ordinary ways of talking about and proclaiming the Good News have been remade and replaced. But make no mistake about it. Horton is clear that ordinary does not mean mediocre. "In fact, far from throwing a wet blanket on godly passion, my goal is to encourage an orientation and habits that foster deeper growth in grace, more effective outreach, and a more sustainable vision of loving service to others over a lifetime. This is not a call to do less, but to invest in things that we often give up on when we don't see an immediate return. The fact that 'ordinary' has come to mean mediocre and low expectations is a sign of the problem I want to address" (p.28). Always focused on the next big thing, movement, or fad in the church, Horton says the church actually fails to focus on the truly next big thing--the second coming of Jesus. Until Jesus returns, Horton reminds us that the ordinary things like catechesis (catechism) and liturgy (hymnal), Word and sacrament, are part of the wonderful ordinary way that faith has been passed on and taught for centuries and invites the reader to celebrate the ordinariness still today. Sadly, what is often given up on is the "ordinariness" of the Good News itself. Namely, that Jesus Christ came to atone for the sins of the lost and the found; that baptism is a gift of God's grace; that the Lord's Supper gives the forgiveness of sins. When these ordinary means just don't seem to be doing what we think they should be doing in the right now, at this moment, immediate demands of our time, they are abandoned for something more flashy, more relevant, and more radical. However, Horton takes joy in lifting up the ordinary message that so many Christians find as inadequate: "The power of our activism, campaigns, movements, and strategies cannot forgive sins or raise the dead. 'The gospel... is the power of God for salvation,' and, with Paul, we have no reason to be ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16). That is why phrases like 'living the gospel,' 'being the gospel,' and 'being partners with Jesus in his redemption of the world' are dangerous distortions of the biblical message of good news. The gospel is not about what we have done or are called to do, but the announcement of God's saving work in Jesus Christ. 'For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake,' (2 Cor. 4:5)." (p. 40). Amen to that! There are far too many well-intentioned but misguided methods, manners, and techniques that in the name of innovation, accommodation, and determination disparage the ordinary means of God at work through his Word and sacraments, and yes even in the liturgy, catechesis, and the pastors of the

Church. "They're not enough" we're told. So something new must be invented and remade. However, Horton unequivocally, biblically, and theologically demonstrates that they are indeed powerful and more than enough: "CNN will not be showing up at a church that is simply trusting God to do extraordinary things through his ordinary means of grace delivered by ordinary servants. But God will. Week after week. These means of grace and the ordinary fellowship of the saints that matures and guides us throughout our life may seem frail, but they are jars that carry a rich treasure" (p. 149). What is more, not only are they enough, but Horton also points to how the ordinariness of our daily lives (the ordinariness of our daily callings/vocations) is also something to be celebrated as part of God's good creation, and are in fact the means of maintaining a "faithful presence" to "enjoy our neighbors" rather than using them to achieve superstardom in the new ways of doing church: "It is easy to turn others in instruments of our ambition rather than loving them for their own sake, as fellow image bearers of God. They become supporting actors--if not props-- in our life movie. Loving actual neighbors through particular actions every day can be a lot more mundane as well as difficult than trying to transform culture. Regardless of the role or place in society to which God has assigned us by our calling, we are content. Our identity is already determined by our being 'in Christ,' not by our accomplishments. The measure of excellence is daily love for our neighbors during this time between Christ's two advents" (p.161). Horton has provided an absolute gem for our times. As one who reads every new thing out there, this book was a breath of ordinary fresh air to fill my lungs. This book is a phenomenal and encouraging read! Before any pastor thinks he needs to start new, join the latest fad, or hire a consultant, he needs to read this book. In fact, it should be required reading for all pastors and aspiring pastors, it's that good and that timely. Thank you Michael Horton for putting out such an important, needed, and ordinary book!

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This book was good. A little monotonous and poorly edited at times as I read the same thoughts and ideas in nearly identical wording/illustrations in different places in the book. Horton was his usual self with many pithy phrases that were quite memorable and as always the Gospel was prominent in his message. You will want to read this work as it will encourage you that holiness often looks ordinary. Being sold-out to Christ doesn't necessarily mean your life has to resemble Francis Chan's. Radical obedience may look like a stay-at-home mom that spends her days quietly wiping noses and bottoms.

Living as a young christian, I've always been taught that christian life is full of

passion and zeal for the Lord. However, my life experience has taught me that zeal and passion comes and goes very quickly. I really will not be able to keep myself in the christian faith is that is all to Christianity. Michael Horton has observed the same problem in the christian circles and wants to bring believers back to the what the bible has to say about being a disciple of Jesus. His message to christian is quite simple, let us seek the ordinary means of grace in our pursuit of Christ in our christian life. Horton first sets up the problem with the current teachings of the church at large. He highlights some of their problematic and wrong teaching. For example, he shows how the word ambition, which was previously referred to as a vice but has now change to be something virtuous. More crucially, Horton shows how the church has moved towards a very short-term view of christian discipleship. We have trained up a group of christians who live on passion and instant results. In the long run, they will eventually leave the church. Simply because the church will never be able to outperform the world in such areas. Having listed out the problems, Horton then moves the readers on to the historic teaching of the church. He helps readers see the importance of the ordinary means that God has already promised and provided – the church, the preaching of the word of God, the Lord supper, and baptism. The christian discipleship process is like the life of a tree, it is not the high-and-lows the trees has in it – its life everyday that makes it big and strong, rather it is the routine daily nurturing of the sun's ray and rain that slowly makes the tree sturdy. After reading this book, I've had a deeper appreciation of the ordinary means of grace that the Lord has given to us. I have a greater anticipation of what the Lord will do as I gather each week in the church listening to the word and partaking of the Lord Supper. I'm not disheartened or discouraged when I can see no observable change in my zeal or passion because I'm assured that the Lord has promised to use those means to help me grow. The growth may be subtle and minute, but as I grow slowly week by week, I know that God is surely helping me grow slowly, but surely to be more and more like Jesus. This book is certainty one I will recommend for any christian, especially if you think the christian life is only about being zealous to God. I hope you will see that the bible's teaching is certainly not about zeal but about growing sustainably in the word of God. We need no other source nor do we need anything to zest it up. Rating: 4.75 / 5

I enjoyed the earlier part of this book, but after a while it seemed to run out of steam, and I struggled to finish it. Horton's main point, that the ordinary everyday things are of importance and that that's where most of us will live a good deal of our lives, is valid, and needs to be said in the light of hyped-up Christian experience many are expected to have. Having made this point over several

chapters, it feels as though the rest of the book is filler, and in the end seems to be covering every possible base. I still think it's a valid book, but probably didn't need to be quite as long...

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