

Lutheran Renewal

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Everyday Encounters

by Mike Bradley

Everyday encounters. These were the words I heard while on a prayer walk in October. Everyday encounters. "Tell My people I long to manifest My presence and power in their ordinary, everyday experiences and relationships that I might impact people with My love and power." As I asked the Lord if this was Him speaking, a memory immediately came to mind. I remembered a particular encounter where the Lord had surprised me in Redding, CA, an encounter on—of all places—a golf course!

I was in Redding for a leadership gathering and had arrived early to see some friends. While there, I decided to hit a bucket of balls at a local driving range. Hitting golf balls at a driving range is an ordinary, everyday kind of experience for me. I do this often back home in Gilbert, Arizona. However, what began as an ordinary, everyday experience soon turned into something else.

I was hitting balls on the range. A man pulled up in a golf cart and got out. As he approached me I couldn't help but notice his full-sleeve tattoos on both arms. His name was Dale, and he wondered if I would join him, his young adult son, and his son's friend for a round of golf. I enjoy playing and meeting new people so I threw my bag on the back of his cart and off we went.



As we played the first few holes, Dale punctuated his joy or disappointment at his shots with language I hadn't heard used so frequently since my days in the Air Force. It was colorful to say the least. He especially enjoyed dropping the f-bomb, a word that seemed to cover a plethora of emotions for him.

On the fourth hole Dale opened his golf bag and pulled out a bong. He lit up, took a toke, coughed, and exclaimed what good stuff it was—only he didn't use the word "stuff." His son and his friend took big hits. Then they offered it to me. I thanked them for their generosity but declined. A few holes

later Dale took out some paper, some more marijuana, rolled a joint, lit it up, and took a long hit. Again he coughed, proclaimed its great quality, passed it to his son and his friend, and then offered to share it with me. He quickly added that he had a medical marijuana card. Again I declined, thanking him for his generous spirit.

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After a few more holes Dale turned to me and said, “You know, I haven’t even asked you what the %&*# you do for a living.”

“I’m a pastor.”

“A pastor?” Dale turned and yelled at his son who was on the other side of the fairway with his friend, “Why didn’t you guys tell me this guy is a %&*#’ing pastor! I’ve been swearing a %&*#’ing blue streak in front of him all day and smoking weed!” Turning back to me with great concern on his face he asked, “I’m going to hell for sure, ain’t I? Smoking weed and swearing to a pastor! I’m toast, ain’t I?”

“Relax, Dale. Your swearing doesn’t upset me. I heard worse when I was in the Air Force. As for smoking weed, that’s not my thing, but you’ve been really generous in offering to share. As for going to hell, that is an important question, and if you’d like, we could discuss it while we finish our game.” So we did. Dale still punctuated his thoughts with his favorite profanity here and there, and immediately apologized when he did. At the end of our round he asked if we could talk some more, but he let me know he wasn’t ready to pray about anything yet.

I told him I was from out of town, but that I knew people in Redding who would love to continue the discussion with him—people I trusted. He gave me his name and phone number, and I gave it to those I knew would lovingly follow up with him. To this day I continue praying for Dale to come to know God’s great love and to surrender his life to Christ. I have no doubt that one day I am going to hear from my friends in Redding that Dale has become a follower of Jesus.

All I wanted was to hit a bucket of golf balls. God had different plans. What began as an ordinary, everyday experience turned into a God encounter for both Dale and me. *Everyday encounters*. I believe the Lord wants to manifest His presence and power in such encounters for us all so He can impact people with His great love and power.

Remembering this everyday encounter with Dale got me to wondering: how many God encounters in Scripture were set in the context of what seemed to be ordinary, everyday situations?

How about the woman at the well? She’s just getting water. She gets up as she does any other day and all she has to look forward to is another mundane trek to and from the well to get water—nothing extraordinary about this day. Until, that is, God chooses to manifest His presence and power in this ordinary, everyday experience to the woman, and through her, to an entire village.

How about the lame man, Peter, and John in Acts 3? All three of them got up that day expecting an ordinary day. Peter and John were going to church as usual, to the Temple at the hour of prayer. And the lame man? Well, he would be found by the Gate called Beautiful to beg for alms just as he did every day of the year. Nothing special, nothing extraordinary about any of it for any of them. Until, that is, God chooses to manifest His presence and power in this ordinary, everyday experience in order to impact the lame man with His love and power. Peter, John, and the lame man were all impacted by God’s love and power in this everyday encounter and so, too, were all the people who heard their testimonies.

The key to ordinary, everyday experiences and relationships becoming *Everyday Encounters* is to become conscious of the *manifestation of the presence and power of God who wants to work through us in our everyday conversations and activities*.

*“Hurry is
the great
enemy of
our spiritual
life.”*

2 Chronicles 16:9

Everyday encounters can significantly impact people's lives. So it should not surprise us when we run into obstacles designed to hinder God from manifesting His presence and power to us and through us. Three hindrances:

- Hurry sickness
- Believing the Lie
- Not continuing to be filled with the Holy Spirit

Hurry sickness

Hurry sickness can hinder us by sapping us of the energy and time required to be alert for *Everyday Encounters*.

John Ortberg writes, "Hurry is the great enemy of our spiritual life. The most serious sign of hurry sickness is a *diminished capacity to love*. Love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible. Love always takes time, and time is one thing hurried people don't have. We must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. This does not mean we will never be busy. Jesus often had much to do, but He never did it in such a way that severed the life-giving connection between Him and His Father. He never did it in a way that interfered with His ability to give love when love was called for."

Let's ask God to do whatever He needs to do in us to reveal when and how we are suffering from hurry sickness. And then let's ask Him to set us free so we'll have the time and energy to respond in the *Everyday Encounters* He places before us.

Believing the Lie

The Lie tells us God could never use someone like us. The Lie hinders us from responding when God presents us with opportunities for *Everyday Encounters*. The Lie is: *You're not the one*. The truth is: *You are the one!*

I love stories of mythic reality because they remind us that the one who seems most unlikely *actually is the one*. Luke Skywalker, the young farmer. Neo, the computer programmer. The big-footed halfling, Frodo, not the returning king, Aragorn. All of them *were the one*. So are you. And the world, the flesh, and the devil will do all they can to keep you from believing that.

This is the truth. You are a key player in God's kingdom purposes in the very places you are positioned: the place where you work, the neighborhood in which you live, the places where you play and relax, and the family you have, immediate and extended.

You are the one through whom God can manifest the presence and power of His Holy Spirit who lives in you so that ordinary, everyday experiences and relationships become *Everyday Encounters* in which God impacts people with His love and power. Don't believe the Lie. And surround yourself with others who refuse to believe it as well.

Not continuing to be filled with the Holy Spirit

Not continuing to be filled with the Holy Spirit is a hindrance to readiness for *Everyday Encounters*. Everything Jesus said and did, he said and did as a human being who was filled with the Holy Spirit. It was only after the Holy Spirit anointed Him that Jesus of Nazareth began to impact others with the power of God (cf. Luke 3:21-22 and Acts 10:37-38). Everything His followers said and did that impacted people for the kingdom of God, they said and did in the power of the Holy Spirit who filled them (see Acts 4:29-32).



It is essential that we remember the Apostle Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:18 to "keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit" and that we keep on asking. Being filled with the Spirit is a prayer God loves to answer. Let's not allow one another to take the Spirit's presence and power for granted. Let's not allow one another to settle for less than all God has for us.



Let's ruthlessly deal with hurry, refuse to believe the Lie, and keep on being filled with the Spirit that we might experience our ordinary, everyday experiences and relationships being transformed by God into *Everyday Encounters* in which He manifests His presence in order to impact people with His love and power.

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Do not Fear

"Am I not the Lord God, the Almighty? Am I not the God that created the heavens and the earth? Am I not the God that moved upon the waters and saved Noah and his family? Am I not the God that sent My only begotten Son to be your Savior?"

I call you to cast down the idol of fear. Cast it down, break it and destroy it in your life and in the families and people around you. Do not worship at the altar of fear, but worship before My throne.

I am the Living God and I have bought you with a price, a price beyond measure, and I call you to worship Me, and to look to Me, the Light of your salvation. You need not fear, for I have cast down fear and I call you to live as people in the victory of My resurrection.

Do not look to the left; do not look the right, but look to Me, for I am your God. I am your Savior.

My light is upon you and I will go before you and make a way for you.

For some it will be hard; it will be difficult. But I will not leave you. I will not forsake you. For I am the Lord God Almighty, and I am with you, and I will take you through—through the fire, and through the depths of the difficulties and the situations of your life. For I love you, My people. I love you with a love that is beyond anything known.

Then I will be with you. I will take you forward. So worship at My throne, and cast down the idol of fear."

Prophetic word received by Fred Thoni, LR Leadership Team, December 29, 2013.

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