

Ordinary to Extraordinary

York Moore

August 7, 2022

The day was hot and salty. My 7-year-old cheek streamed with grit and sweat from a long day of play in the field behind our house. It was the first time I can actually remember living in a house. We had been homeless on the streets of Detroit, living in abandoned buildings and cars. But my parents had managed to get enough money together to rent what my brothers and I now refer to as the farmhouse. Just a broke-down house on a broke-down street. But it had a barn and a field out back where remnants of a time gone by were beginning to emerge -- potatoes and squash. And we played all day in that field of mud, throwing ordinary vegetables and ordinary mud at one another all the way until dusk, and that's when it happened.

In the distance, I could hear the strange hum, the buzz of an insect that I now know to be a cicada bug. The reddish blue sky filled with stars. It seemed as if the whole world came to a holy hush for a moment of magic. And there they were, hovering above the mud and potatoes. Blips of green, spackles of light. And not knowing what I was seeing, but determined to find out, I ran into the barn and grabbed an old mason jar and ran into that field determined to capture light in the bottle. It wasn't hard. Within a few minutes, I had managed to capture about a dozen or so phosphorus-filled bugs with what I call "butts of light." And I ran into the house, and I said, "Mom, our house is magic. Look at these bugs with butts of light," and with a laugh, my mom began to explain the science behind a firefly or a lightning bug. But no matter how reasonable or rational her explanation was, at the age of 7, I was as sure of one thing -- that I was living in a world of magic.

45 years later, whenever a field comes alive at dusk with these butts of light, my mind, my heart, my soul is connected to that moment when I was sure the world was filled with magic. Fireflies are so fantastical. It's almost as if they're an artifact from another time and space. They're so wondrous, I have a hard time believing they're just a normal, natural part of this world. I want to tell you that there's something magical about experiencing the extraordinary. An ordinary field on an ordinary day was filled with magic with an extraordinary insect carrying light in its belly.

Now, the word extraordinary literally means beyond what is usual, ordinary, regular, or established. There's nothing wrong with ordinary things. We love ordinary things. We want to pay ordinary prices for ordinary gas in our cars. As a person who flies almost every single week, I like ordinary flights that get there on time with very little turbulence. I'm from Detroit, Michigan, where we like ordinary things like watching the Detroit Lions lose every single Thanksgiving Day. But there's something crazy-good, super-awesome about the extraordinary things of life. The extraordinary things, they fill our lives with joy, and they bring us back to a time when we were sure the world was magic.

I want to talk to you about some great ideas, some firefly ideas that are so powerful that if you would embrace them, they would unleash an extraordinary season in your life. So powerful that if you will embrace them, not only will you have the capacity to live your best life, you will have within you a light from another world that has the power to change the world. And the first principle is this -- that experiencing the extraordinary grows joy-filled amazement in your life. Now, let me tell you what I mean. When you have an experience with something that's truly unusual, something that is otherworldly, the natural response is to stand and wonder, to be amazed. Extraordinary things, they fill our souls, they give us a greater capacity for wonder. And true wonder can turn into lifelong joy if we choose to embrace it.

Now, here's what it means for you today. In your life, you can experience lifelong joy by embracing the extraordinary. If we would properly respond to the extraordinary story playing out

all around us, I believe that we can be people of joy, lifelong joy, and this is where Jesus Christ comes in, because the story of Jesus is the story of the extraordinary.

Now, the story of Jesus is filled with magical moments, transformational moments. But the life of Jesus was filled with ordinary moments just like ours. They were transformed into the extraordinary. Like a light flickering in a field of magic, Jesus turns ordinary things into extraordinary, from food to water, to fish to trees, but ultimately to peoples. Jesus took ordinary people and transformed them into extraordinary people of joy.

I want to show you what I mean by looking at just one of the ordinary days in the life of Jesus that became extraordinary for those who chose to believe and enter into this magical story of Jesus. Jesus' ministry had not yet gone live. He was still relatively unknown. He's just at the beginning of putting together what he calls disciples. Now, for us, disciple is a religious word. But in Jesus' day, you could be a disciple of a mason, a jeweler, or a carpenter. It simply means to pattern yourself after the expertise of somebody who's further along in their life. And we have the same thing in our day. You can be an intern in an industry. It's the same thing as being a disciple. You're patterning yourself, learning to get equipped in an area of passion, hoping that one day you, too, will be an expert in that industry. Jesus is gathering his interns. He had not yet gone live, and that's where we pick up the story in **John, chapter 2**.

"On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus and his disciples had been invited to the wedding. And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to his servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' And now, standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rights of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. And Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the chief steward.' So, they took it. And when the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and he did not know where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine when the guests have become drunk, but you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him."

This is the first sign, the first blip of light, the first speckle of green that shows the watching world that there's something extraordinary and beautiful in the person of Jesus, and his disciples believed in him. Again, Jesus is just three days into this recruitment campaign. This is before LinkedIn. This is before Uber. And he's going from village to village looking for ordinary women and men who will follow him into an extraordinary and beautiful story.

Now, in order to understand why running out of wine was such a crisis, you have to understand that the weddings of Jesus' day, they weren't like our BYOB affairs on a Saturday, some kind of three to five hours. No, these were full-on wedding festivals. People would've been coming from far and wide, by foot, by animal, sleeping and eating and drinking on the property for days on end. It's a multi-day wedding festival. And people would've come hungry and expecting.

We also know that this is a very large wedding. At the very front of the wedding are stone jars capable of holding about 180 gallons of water for the ritual purification of the Jews. So, what would happen, you would arrive at this ceremony or this festival, and you would take about an eggshell's worth of water, and you would wash your hands to prepare yourself to enter into this family wedding. The mother of Jesus is there and was probably officially involved in the wedding preparations, giving her a sense of responsibility and authority over the wedding servants. This is a family wedding on the side of Jesus. Mary is involved in running the wedding, and as they run out, Mary goes to Jesus to solve this extraordinary problem. But why was that so important? Listen. Running out of wine at a weeklong party was a problem for

many reasons. In this culture and this time, it would've been a mark of shame, a lack of preparedness, something that would've stayed in the minds of family and friends for years to come.

Families are funny things, and when you marry into a family, they get even funnier. Maybe you're married, but maybe you're not, maybe you're swiping left, you're swiping up, but one day, you'll swipe right. And when you do, I want to tell you, you never marry a person. You marry a story.

I married into a very large and involved family. And every Sunday, there are typically between 35 and 45 people now at my farm. But back when I first married into the family, at Grandma's house -- and I had no idea how this day of days, it's almost like a mini Thanksgiving, was supposed to work -- that after you're done eating, the kids go out back to fight or play, usually a combination of the two, and the adults go into the living room to do something called visiting. And I had never experienced that before.

So, I'm sitting there in awkward stares and silence before grandma starts the visiting by saying, "It looks like it's going to be a cold winter, according to the Farmer's Almanac." I thought that was odd. And then grandpa says, "Well, it doesn't look like the Tigers are going to make it into the postseason playoffs." Small talk and chit chat, they kind of unsettle me, so I thought I would increase the value of the conversation. So, I threw out what I thought was a real zinger. I said, "Don't you think the globalization forces are putting stress on the domestic automakers leading into the increase in cost and a reduction in productivity?" and you would've thought I shot Grandma. I looked terribly bad. Week in and week out, I didn't understand what was going on. It wasn't until I stopped, and I listened, and I learned that I was able to enter into this visit.

Now, as I sat there in awkward silence, Grandma saved the day by saying, "I put a birdfeeder out back, and I've already seen two hummingbirds." As I began to study the rhythms of this new family that I had married into, I began to realize a few things. First of all, the matriarch of the family, she starts the visiting. Second of all, I had no right to speak. I should be out back fighting and playing with the children. And third of all, you don't talk about globalized forces, this, that, or the other. It puts undue stress on what should be just a relatively fun time of visiting. So, after a few weeks of listening and learning, I was actually able to contribute to visiting. I said, "There's a sale on truck tires down at the Costco," and so now I've learned to visit.

In this story, the groom is marrying into a family just like that, with rules and expectations and traditions. And one of the big ones is you don't run out of wine at a multi-day wedding festival. You see, the groom is marrying into a family that had hopes and dreams, and they had dreamt of this day of days for their little girl. And now it's here, and in the midst of that, they run out of wine. Now, you have to understand that wine in the Bible is actually more important than it is in our society and culture. Wine in the Bible is symbolic. Wine represents joy and community. It represents love and celebration. The picture of wine in the story of God is a picture of the ultimate purpose of life.

In the book of Isaiah, we read about the ultimate future wedding feast of the lamb. It says, *"On this mountain, the Lord almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wine."* You see, a glass of wine is at the extraordinary center of the wedding culture. And here in Jesus' story, the groom has run out of the main ingredient of life. So, Mary gets Jesus to solve this extraordinary problem. And his solution is easy -- turn 180 gallons of religious ritual water into the best wine ever. So, as Jesus turns water into wine, it creates a response. As the servants bring it to the master of the ceremony, there's this sense of wonder and amazement, a surprise reaction because it's a radical break with the cultural norms of wedding culture.

Now, we see in this response -- everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk, but you've kept the good wine until now. This

steward of the bridegroom, he's the master of ceremonies. He knows all things weddings, and he's working for the groom. And as he drinks this new wine, he has a sense of amazement. The MC has no idea that the wine that he's drinking now had just magically been transformed from ritual water into extraordinary wine. He only knows that he's drinking this great wine, and it creates an automatic sense of wonder. And I want to say that as important as cultural norms are, traditions, rules, when we experience Jesus Christ, we move to a different level. We transcend expectations. We become a part of a new tradition when we experience the extraordinary story of God.

Now, it's important that Jesus turned religious water, holy water, into wine because in this sign, we see a few things. First, the story of God is ultimately the story of celebration. Second, the story of God puts joy before religion. And third, the story of God puts belonging before tradition. You see, Jesus doesn't just want to provide wine at weddings, he wants to transform us. The rules and the regulations and the traditions that are so important, he's inviting us into something beautiful and extraordinary.

Entering into the story of Jesus, it's not about being religious. It's about being transformed into a person of joy. God invites us to pick up our mason jars of faith, to follow Jesus Christ into a world of broken lives and forgotten dreams, to be transformed, and to transform the world around us. Experiencing the extraordinary points us to our ultimate purpose in life, and that's the second principle.

Let me tell you what I mean. Jesus had just performed something beautiful, something incredible, a sign. He had turned ordinary water into extraordinary wine, and that's much more than a miracle. It was a sign. Now, miracles are events that occur counter to the natural way in which the universe works. Instantaneous healings, the dead brought back to life, the ability to speak fluently in unknown languages. But signs are actually more than miracles, they're symbolic wonders that paint a bigger picture, that point to something beautiful and extraordinary, and this is a big one, because it's Jesus' first sign.

In the story of Jesus, we do see him performing lots of miracles, raising the dead, healing the sick, freeing people from demonic possession. But none of those were chosen to be his first sign. His first sign is simply to turn water into wine, and it's the best wine ever. In the signs of Jesus, we discover the very purpose of life. Signs point us to the ultimate meaning of the story of God in your lives.

Now, let me tell you what this means for you. Have you ever asked the question, "Why am I here? What's it all for? Where is it all going?" Listen, Jesus, isn't gathering interns for a profession or a career or an industry. He's gathering interns to enter into the extraordinary story of God. And this is our purpose in life, to pattern ourselves after Jesus Christ, to follow him as the master of our lives. Jesus is looking for interns for the story of God, women and men who will follow him into something beautiful and extraordinary, a life of joy.

The reason why Jesus chose to turn water into wine as his first sign was because wine was a symbol of God's desire to create a community of joy, people who would be filled with awe, amazement, and wonder. And for those of you who know the story of Jesus, you also know that this is how the story ends, drinking wine with friends before his death, making a pledge that he would never again drink of that wine until it had its ultimate fulfillment in the world to come.

Jesus is ultimately inviting us to follow him with childlike wonder to experience life of joy and gladness together with him and together with one another. And we're never closer to that, are we, than when we are like children watching that magical flickering light over a field of mud. That's why Jesus said these words, "Truly, I tell you, unless you turn and become like children, you're never going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." That's God's invitation to us. Jesus chose to focus on the ordinary because, listen. It's in the transformation of the ordinary to the extraordinary where God's glory is on full display.

You know, I oftentimes wonder, couldn't Jesus have just turned some wine into more wine? That's what he did with the bread and the fish. He multiplied that, and I'm sure they had an old bottle of Yellow Tail out back. But instead, he chooses to transform the leftover religious water into the best wine ever, and here's why. Because this is exactly what he does with people. He takes our leftover parts, our broken parts, our places of shame, the places that we've forgotten about, and he transforms it into something beautiful. Will you let God transform your life into something beautiful? And this leads us to our last principle.

Listen, experiencing the extraordinary, it's going to draw you in to the story of God personally. Let me tell you what I mean. If we choose to believe, to embrace with that inner childlike faith, to experience the person of Jesus, we're going to find ourselves personally involved in the story of God. The interns of Jesus have been changing the world ever since this first sign at this wedding of this unknown couple. But now let me tell you what this means for you. If you will choose to believe, if you will choose to follow Jesus, you're going to find yourself involved in the extraordinary of God. We call that mission.

Now, the followers of Jesus, they're nothing more than ordinary people living on the edge, doing crazy-good things in a field of modern forgotten potatoes. But the followers of Jesus, they get to see the backroom magic that leads to a life of joy and amazement. They get to see themselves transformed as they transform the world around us. Look at **verse 11**. Again, it says, *"Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee and revealed this glory and his disciples believed in him."* You see the signs of Jesus, they reveal the glory of Jesus. You say, "What's the glory of Jesus?" It's Jesus unplugged. It's Jesus full of other worldly light. It's Jesus on full display. The glory of Jesus reveals who Jesus is, and it's God's invitation to us to follow him. You know something interesting? I didn't really realize before I began to study fireflies that largely they don't exist west of Kansas. They need the humid conditions of the Midwest and the upper Northeast. But try explaining a firefly to somebody who lives, say, in Tucson, Arizona, or Southern California. You can show them pictures or YouTube videos. But can I tell you that there are no words to the feeling that you get standing on the field's edge in front of a forest set to the canopy of stars in the sound of cicadas, watching that field flicker alive.

Now, have you ever seen a firefly in the daytime? They are nothing extraordinary. In fact, you might mistake a firefly for any number of common beetles. But listen. It isn't until the darkness comes that you see the glory of the firefly. And when you see the glory of Jesus, you believe in Jesus, you follow Jesus. And as we follow Jesus, he gives us this light from another world to light up the night. The interns of Jesus are carriers of this very glory of a light from another world, a light that has the capacity to change the darkness, not only in our lives, but in the world around us. The story of Jesus is full of interns who have changed the world.

I was in Cambodia a number of years ago, doing anti-trafficking work, and while I was there, in preparation, I made appointments to meet lots of important people. People from the royal government, people running universities, business leaders. But I made it a point to make an appointment with a man I'm just going to call D. D. was singularly responsible for intelligence that led to the release of hundreds and hundreds of child slaves, sex slaves. I spent the day meeting about 180 of the children who had been rescued from brothels because of D.'s work. And to sit across the table from 6, 8, 12-year-old children who had been rescued from sex slavery was transformative. To see their bright smiles, their pressed outfits, the sense of hope, they had been transformed. But listen, none of them knew D.'s name. None of them realized that their freedom was responsible because of his hard work and the risks that he took.

I jumped in a little motorized taxi called a took-took, and went across town, and I was brought into this militarized compound where I was to meet D. They brought me to a dark room, and they brought him in with sunglasses, and I said, "This is some .007 stuff right here." And I just said, "D., listen. I want to tell you that you've inspired me. You've inspired a nation of

activists in the United States. Your work is epic, and I just want to thank you for the work that you do," and I'll never forget his words. He said, "It's an honor to do what I'm doing for Jesus." Can I tell you that D.'s light is shining extra bright because he's choosing to let it shine in a place of great darkness. D.'s work is a perfect example of an ordinary person doing extraordinary things in a dark and dirty place. The light D. has in his mason jar, it's full, and it's extra bright because he lives in a dirty and dark place. But, my friends, isn't that where Jesus shines best?

Some people, they're like fireflies in the daytime. They have no need for lighting up the world because the world is safe, and they're living ordinary lives. But they're just like every single other person. But if you want Jesus to light up your life, he calls you to be light in a dark and muddy world. He wants you to rush into that field of corn and potatoes and broken dreams and mud with a light that can transform not only your life but the life around you.

So, how do we apply this to our lives today? Listen, you can be transformed from ordinary to extraordinary through knowing and believing Jesus Christ. Let me tell you what I mean. The servants in the backroom pouring the water into massive stone jars, they were witnesses of the glory of Jesus. They saw the magic, and as they saw the magic, they chose to believe and to become interns of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me tell you what this means for you. You can know Jesus personally. You can become one of his interns, listen, by seeing and believing his greatest sign. You see turning water into wine, that was Jesus' first sign, but he saved the best for last. He wants you to see and believe his greatest sign. Throughout the life of Jesus, he was always referring to his death on the cross and his resurrection as the greatest sign that everyone throughout time and space would be able to see. When Jesus hung on the cross, he suffered, he bled, he died. And it wasn't an ordinary death. It was beautiful. It was extraordinary.

In the darkest moment, Jesus hung like a common criminal. Being executed for one of the many ordinary crimes that you could be executed under in Rome. But listen. There was something beautiful and remarkable and magical about his death. In **Mark 15**, we read these words, *"At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, and at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi Eloi Lema Sabachthani,' which means, 'My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?'"*

Listen, Jesus died in the path of totality. And in the shadow of that eclipse, something beautiful, something extraordinary was released. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed this last. And the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. Now, listen. For the Roman soldier, glory was the highest ideal. To die a glorious death was the highest aspiration a Roman soldier could ever have. And that's why these words are so powerful. It says, "When the Centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the son of God, the very person who was responsible for the execution of the son of God.' When he looked up and he saw the sign of Jesus hanging on the cross, he said, 'Surely, this man was the son of God.'"

See, Jesus' death on the cross wasn't just glorious, it was extraordinary. It was a sign full of meaning and power, of bright light. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the debt, the penalty for all that we've done and all that we've left undone. And in the story of God, we learned that all of us have a soul sickness, a disease that the Bible calls sin. And sin is much more than just bad things that bad people do. It's a sickness deep in our hearts that fills us with darkness. We live in a world that is corrupted by sin. But, my friend, here's the firefly idea that changes everything -- that when Jesus died on the cross for our sin, he rose on the third day. And he's alive. And because Jesus is alive, we can know him personally, and he can give to us this other-worldly light that can transform our lives and transform the world.

My friend, have you received Jesus Christ? In just a moment, I'm going to pray a simple prayer. And if you are willing to take that first step to choose to become an intern of Jesus, I'm going to invite you to make the decision that can change your life and to change the world, the decision to put your faith in Jesus Christ. He died your death, he rose again on the third day,

and the Bible promises that if we confess him as our Lord, our master, our leader, in other words, we choose to become his intern, we can have everlasting life. Not only in the world to come, but we can have eternal life right here, right now, by choosing to be women and men of joy. Would you like that? Would you like your sins to be washed free? Would you like to receive the power and the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ? If that's what you want, I want you to pray this simple prayer. Pray these words, "Jesus, forgive my sin. Come into my life and be my Lord. I believe you died on the cross and rose again in Jesus' name."