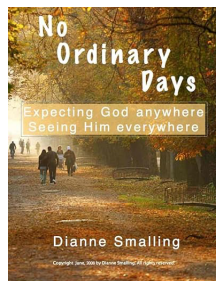


NO ORDINARY DAYS

by

Dianne Smalling



Kindle

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If Jesus is Lord of all, then he is Lord of the trivia of life also. I hope this booklet helps you find him there.

—Dianne Smalling

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God has surely
listened and heard
my voice in prayer.
Psalm 66:19



AUSTRIAN ENCOUNTER

The lady next to me had brought her laundry in a suitcase. I smiled at this classic picture of a meticulous Austrian. I greeted her in German while slipping my four shillings into the slot of the washer.

At age nineteen, I had just arrived in Vienna. Missionary school had trained me to expect impromptu opportunities to share my faith. The one-hour wait for laundry made this a divine appointment.

The Austrian poked carefully at the boiling water with a stick to assure all her linen received its fair share of suds. Our amiable chitchat eventually led to my question,

“What do you think about God?”

“Oh, I believe He exists. But of course, I don’t bother God over little things. For example, I wouldn’t ask Him to help me find my misplaced keys,” she replied emphatically.

Up to the last folded towel, we politely disagreed on God’s interest and participation in minute matters. I can still hear that conversation in Vienna. It was a divine appointment all right . . . between God and a 19-year-old. He was challenging me to discover His greatness in the trivia.

I decided to deliberately examine God's smallness. All of His attributes fit just as neatly into tiny areas. But wait! Am I even an adequate judge of what

is small? If I ignore God about a misplaced key, what's to keep me from a similar attitude concerning my ministry? Can I disregard Him there?

These days I'm on an adventure. I expect God anywhere . . . I discover Him everywhere. Even in the minutiae. Anticipation has invaded my prayer life. Why expect ordinary days?

... and confessed,
that they were
strangers and
pilgrims on the
earth ...
Hebrews 11:13



THE SUITCASE

Mom arrived pulling a heavy suitcase. Our wedding in England was a small affair, and she was our only relative able to come. Roger and I had fallen in love while on the mission field in Europe. Mom happily

boarded the long flight from California for our big day.

With the excitement centering on Roger and me, I hadn't thought to ask Mom about her return flight. When I finally inquired, I was shocked to hear her plans. She wasn't going back! Instead, she emptied her suitcase and presented it to us, along with gifts tucked lovingly inside. Looking back, I can't recall what she used for her own few belongings.

Roger and I waved 'so long' to the wedding guests and left in a borrowed car for our honeymoon.

Mom promptly headed out on the adventure of a lifetime. She kept it a secret that she had only five pounds sterling in her purse. With that, Mom walked from the wedding party over to the train station and asked the ticket master how far that amount would take her. "To Tunbridge Wells," he replied. Off she went, without looking back.

The impact of her ministry for Christ and the account of God's faithful supply seem endless. God eventually used Mom in ministry on five continents over twenty-five years.

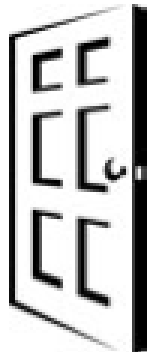
Today I hold her Bible. Pasted over the maps and concordance pages are photos, the smiling faces of her "family" from all cultures, reflecting her

powerful influence for Christ.

Mom's final journey took her to Kenya, where God eventually called her Home. She is buried exactly where her heart resided.

In retrospect, Mom presented us with far more than a suitcase on our wedding day. Her incredible example was tucked inside. It still challenges us to step boldly out onto God's promises. With God, five pounds sterling went much further than Tunbridge Wells!

I have been young,
and now am old, yet I
have not seen the
righteous forsaken or
his children begging
for bread.



BEHIND THE DOOR

The young couple sat on our couch sipping soda, oblivious to our muffled search.

Roger and I had excused ourselves to the bedroom, a mere door away. We were scouring our room frantically for the impossible...cash, to purchase food for Peter and his new bride over the weekend.

Drawers, pockets, and a desperate peek under the bed all collaborated against any hope of a hidden windfall. Our apartment was minuscule, our income even smaller. Unexpected company added a rush of adrenaline to our white-knuckle budget.

Our friends had stopped by during their honeymoon to visit us in Toulouse, France. Roger and I were also newlyweds, just beginning missionary work in southern France. In their single days, Roger and Peter had ministered together briefly on the campus of the Sorbonne University in Paris.

Roger and I shrugged our shoulders and resolved to face reality. We would have to explain the dilemma to our guests. I reached for the doorknob.

At that very instant, I recalled that mail sometimes comes twice a day in Toulouse. Usually, junk mail is reserved for afternoon delivery. Roger stayed in the bedroom while I slipped quietly out the back door toward the mailbox. Among the advertisements was an envelope. I tore it open. Out fell a check from a friend in England.

It was now 4 p.m. The banks closed at five for the weekend. I thrust the check in Roger's hand. Somehow, we managed to feign calmness as we opened our door leading to the living room. Smiling at the blissful honeymooners, Roger tranquilly asked, "Peter, would you like to go along with me to the bank?"

It's been 33 years since the check was in the mail. Two weeks ago we received an email. Peter happened upon our website and contacted us out of the blue. He and his wife, kids, and grandkids are still ministering in France. He never realized the extraordinary day we all had.

CAR TALK

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. Prov.16:9

If a donkey could speak to Balaam, then this might have been Jeep-speech for “I’m not the vehicle you’re taking to Guatemala.” To drive from California to Guatemala, wouldn’t you pick the four-wheel-drive Jeep over Grandma’s ancient Chrysler?



We sensed God might not be backing our plans to use the Jeep to get us to our next mission field location. Our first clue was when it died a noisy death in the parking lot of my dad’s condo.

The nightmare began when we borrowed Grandma’s car to take the Jeep’s battery for repair. When we arrived at the mechanic’s shop, I discovered the battery had tipped over on the floor of Grandma’s spotless Chrysler. I quickly wiped up battery acid, along with bits of dissolved carpet, which until then was in mint condition. This couldn’t be happening!

It called for radical praying. Up popped a radical idea. We could offer to purchase Grandma’s car. What about the Jeep? Sell the beast. From that point our nightmare began to evaporate. Grandma relished the idea of getting rid of her Chrysler. The Jeep sold within days.

We drove Grandma’s car from California to Guatemala. Every weekend we used it to drive to a rural village where we helped plant a church. Before we left Guatemala, we sold the car to another missionary who drove it throughout Mexico and across the U.S. several times. Years later, he drove

it to visit us in Colorado. The engine had been replaced, and the odometer showed over 180,000 miles. Rugged miles indeed!

The Jeep seemed to realize it wasn't destined for Guatemala from the get-go. It was we who were clueless. Have you ever tried to pump life into a dead plan? Bury the original plan. God has something extraordinary in mind.

OBJECT LESSON

... you are
worried and
upset about
many things, but
only one thing is
needed ...
Luke 10:41,42



I was anxious to make our empty apartment homey as we began our ministry in the provincial town of Cuenca, Ecuador. What should I buy first out of our limited budget? Thankfully, the former tenants had left us a bed. That, and a rocking chair, became our first furnishings.

Another missionary family invited us over for coffee. I noticed their hospitality mirrored their welcoming apartment. They had moved to Ecuador from their native Norway a couple of years before and were enjoying a vibrant ministry. Ingrid served us from a little wooden tray. The cups, sugar bowl, and creamer matched the lovely tile surface of the tray. I remarked over its charm.

“I want you to have it!” Ingrid smiled.

My jaw dropped. “No, you don’t understand,” I stammered. I assumed Ingrid misinterpreted my comment.

“I was only admiring your taste.”

“No,” Ingrid insisted, “I really want to give it to you.”

“You certainly hold your things lightly!” I blurted.

Ingrid wiped her hands on the kitchen towel and smiled. “It wasn’t always so.” She shared her adventure. . .

“Before we left Norway, I was fretting over what to take and what to leave

behind. I made a list with two columns: Leave/Take. I spent anxious hours mentally rearranging objects from one column to the other. Those decisions even invaded my sleep.

‘One day, a fire broke out. We lost everything. I was left with one thing . . . a sense of relief! We would go to Ecuador with nothing and begin from there.’”

I glanced beyond her kitchen. God had provided all the lovely extras, like this serving set. I went back to our apartment that evening with the charming tray and cups. As I placed them on the counter, they became an object lesson: not of things restored, but of a heart made light . . . light enough to soar.

DUET ON AISLE EIGHT

... faithful in
prayer.

Romans 12:12



I was pondering different brands on the supermarket shelf when I overheard a nearby shopper singing softly to herself. She was concluding the final line of How Great Thou Art. I turned toward her and commented on the truth of those words.

Feigning her focus on the shelf in front of her, she quietly acknowledged, “*I have to sing.*”

The words ‘have to’ drew involuntary puddles to her eyes. Tears spilled over, too quickly to catch as she dabbed at them. I inquired if she had recently lost a loved one. At first, she couldn’t speak but shook her head no.

After a moment of composure, she mentioned her two sons. Flor divulged few details, but her two index fingers gestured that a breach had developed between the sons.

Recently I had been asking God to make me more aware of opportunities to pray on the spot for others’ needs. Could aisle eight of the grocery store be such a setting?

I put my arm around Flor’s shoulder. “We’re family. Where two or more gather in His name, God promises to listen. Let’s pray about this.”

Nearby shoppers quietly ignore us as Flor and I briefly prayed about her sons. Flor and I realized this encounter was orchestrated. Jesus’ presence

turned our duet into a trio.

Our farewell seemed as brief as our introduction. I smiled at the thought that two strangers just accessed God's throne from a grocery store.

THE COOKIE LADY

... It is the Lord
Christ you are
serving.
Colossians 3:24



Myrtle wakes up every morning with the same routine. To the casual observer, she is limited in her senior years. She goes to the

kitchen, gets out her big yellow bowl, and begins to combine the ingredients for her best chunky chip cookies. Once they're baked and cooling on a rack nearby, she sits in a rocker to enjoy her Bible reading.

A recipe card is tucked in her apron pocket. Myrtle ends her quiet time by carefully writing on the card the particular verse that warmed her heart that morning.

Myrtle's God is a love-lavisher. Each new day finds her preparing a cookie plate with a verse tucked under the cellophane. Then Myrtle talks to the Lord about an opportunity to give away these cookies along with the encouragement verse.

I've never met Myrtle. You see, my friend Sharon was a recipient of her cookies and verse. When Sharon told me about Myrtle, I knew I had the perfect illustration for those who think God can't use them.

Myrtle doesn't realize it, but she's now a world traveler. Her reputation goes far beyond her little kitchen. I've used her example with women in Ecuador and Mexico. And now you know about her.

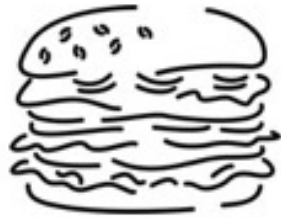
Myrtle expects far more from God than ORDINARY DAYS. She stirs anticipation right into her cookie recipe, then relies on the prime ingredient for her humble ministry . . . God's anointing.

Let them give thanks
to the LORD . . .

For He has
satisfied the thirsty
soul, and the hungry
soul He has filled
with what is good.

Psalm 107:8,9

McMIRACLE



ahead abruptly take off.

Sam's car was idling in front of the speaker outside the fast food restaurant. He placed his order and pulled forward to pay. He glanced up to see the car just

After handing Sam his order, the employee asked if he would also like five free sandwiches. The folks in the first car had changed their minds after placing an order and had left. Sam put the bag beside him on the seat and drove to his office at the nearby mission headquarters.

Billy, a missionary candidate with his wife and three kids, was coming out the door of the office. They had just returned from a long trip to raise funds for their future ministry in Jamaica and had dropped by the mission office to check on their account. They were now heading over to McDonald's for lunch.

Are you smiling? They sure did, as Sam handed them the five sandwiches as though they had just placed an order.

When Billy and Sam related this story at our mission prayer time, I thought of Billy's kids. Hamburger chains strive for brand recognition on impressionable minds. This timely token allowed the *Golden Arches* to unintentionally engrave a 'God sees me' moment on these kids' memories. A bona fide *happy meal!*

Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food. 1Kings17:9



GOD'S GUESTHOUSE

I opened the door to a bare guest room. The furniture had been sold.

I thought, Whew, so ends an epoch! In just a few days, we leave Ecuador. I bet we've had at least 500 guests in three years.

'R-r-r-rrring'

How can the phone be working when the line has been dead all day? I wondered.

"Hello?"

"Dianne, this is Pastor Jose. Isn't this your last weekend in Ecuador? Our family wants to come spend it with you two!"

"Well, uh, that's great!" I blurted, trying to sound thrilled over this Ecuadorian version of a warm farewell.

Before Jose could say another word, the line went dead once again. The country was experiencing blackouts. José's phone call was the only one to get through in over a week.

With the dead connection making their plans irreversible, I glanced up to see Roger enter the room. "Guess who just called?" I stammered, eyebrows raised.

Suddenly, I sensed God dealing with me about the position of my eyebrows. *Why are your eyebrows raised? Isn't it my guesthouse? Why does furniture matter?*

José and family came that weekend . . . with their own bedding, like a slumber party! Even our canary sang happily over the scene. Our little bird seemed even happier as they left, for he went along with them to his new home on the sunny coast of Ecuador.

I still sometimes raise my brows over things the Lord asks me to do. He ignores it, though, and plows ahead with His plans. He's not into ordinary days.

Once you were
not a people . . .
but now you are
the people of
God
1 Peter 2:9

GREAT EXPECTATION



I puzzled over the one-word bumper sticker on the car ahead. 'WHATEVER'

Of all the statements to paste on chrome, why choose that? I could almost hear the sigh of boredom.

I contrasted that attitude with a vivid memory from my childhood. I can still see my mom rubbing her hands in anticipation. "What is God going to do today?" She was an early riser in more ways than one. Surely God was at work, and she was poised for the action. Mom had great expectations.

As I waited for the green light, the bumper sticker challenged me to evaluate my own attitude.

Could I actually be asleep in the middle of God's activity?

How do I become an 'expecter'? Do I pray for big things, things that require a miracle? Do I see my day from God's viewpoint? He just may turn the predictable into the extraordinary.

The car ahead turned the corner and disappeared out of sight. I wonder what bumper sticker adequately depicts a great expecter?

How about *No Ordinary Days*?

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

ROOMS TO GO



As newlywed missionaries in France, we discovered a small house for rent.

We could not believe the

modest price. The landlord was primarily interested in having someone there to maintain it. However, we had no money for furniture.

Just before we moved in, the printer who did our evangelism brochures phoned. He and his wife wanted to give us a dining room set. It had eight chairs and a matching hutch. It looked like it belonged in a showroom. How perfect for our Wednesday night Bible studies!

We moved into the little house with only this dining set and a couple of suitcases. Later that day a French Salvation Army friend phoned to say he was on his way over to our new place.

He drove up in a moving truck. A widow who was downsizing wanted to donate furniture, even a sewing machine. Our little house was entirely furnished in one day.

Many Bible studies took place around that dining room table. Over time, quite a few visitors enjoyed our guest bed.

The capstone came at the end of our term. When we notified the landlord we were leaving, he asked us to put a price on all the furnishings and simply

leave them in the house. He bought everything in one fell swoop!

It seems comical to us now how we had thought moving in and moving out would be ordinary.

... make the most of every opportunity.
Colossians 4:5



HIGH ALTITUDE MISSION FIELD

Surrounded by luggage at five thirty in the morning, we heard the dreaded words, “Your flight has

been canceled.” We had to be in Mexico for ministry that very afternoon.

The airline managed to transfer our ticket to another company. The impromptu change gave us seating next to Maria.

She was headed to Mexico to be reunited with her husband. Alex had flown to Mexico City to be with his dying father three years earlier. After the funeral he discovered his U.S. immigration papers were lacking final status, prohibiting his return to his American wife and their four children. Three years of legal rubber-stamping were now culminating in a Mexican courthouse. Maria was headed to Mexico City to appear with Alex before a judge to determine if Alex could return to Tennessee.

Maria shared her ordeal during the three-year absence of her husband. God had rescued a daughter from drowning and healed a son from epilepsy. She realized the Lord was somehow through this drawing her to Himself.

Rehearsing these events with me, María seemed to become freshly aware of God's goodness to her. "God put you right here . . . in this seat next to me!" María said, weeping. I sensed God at work as we prayed together.

Leaning my head back against the seat, I recalled those anxious pre-dawn events in the airport. I was amused to discover that on the way to the ministry in Mexico I had a mission field . . . sitting in 12-D.

I know, O LORD,
that a man's life is
not his own;
it is not for man
to direct his steps.
Jeremiah 10:23



SURPRISE ME

Appointments made by You I see,
Within a stranger's face,
Like a friendly shoulder-tap,
To participate in grace...

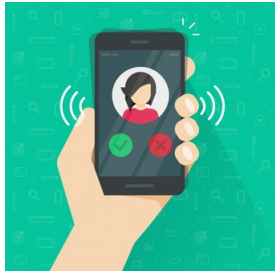
Aware You're working in the small
As well as in the grand...
I peek beyond the ordinary
To glimpse Your greater plan.

Where are You today at work?
Whose life to touch by mine?
Where will you breathe your Spirit's
power?
And grant new hope divine?

Surprise me, Lord.
Today!

SOUL STRENGTH

He will have no fear
of bad news; his
heart is steadfast,
trusting in the
LORD.



Psalm 112:7

Roger disappeared into the store to purchase batteries while I waited in the car. Suddenly the cell phone rang beside me on the seat. The doctor stated abruptly that my results were in:

I had breast cancer.

The call was so brief that once it ended, I had a few moments to gather disjointed thoughts into one prayer before Roger returned. *Lord, give me soul strength! And please grant the same to Roger.*

Just then I spotted him coming towards the car.

Over the following weeks, emails poured in from people praying for me. One pastor's wife had recently undergone cancer treatment. She wrote, "I asked the Lord to make me not merely a survivor, but a flourisher." Her attitude articulated my prayer from that point.

Fear is often worse than the reality. It can become a stranglehold. Corrie ten Boom summed it up nicely: "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its troubles; it empties today of its strength."

At my weakest point, God graciously pinned my heart to His character.

I'm thankfully writing this from the well side of cancer. God graciously took care of the problem. I now hesitate to refer to cancer as the *problem*, for in unexpected ways God turned it into a gift.

MUSINGS IN THE MIRROR

But God, who
set me apart
from birth...
Galatians 1:15



unique ministry.

As I drove along the mountain road, I listened to a sermon on the radio. The preacher was reading from Galatians, showing how God called Paul for a

The radio preacher noted, “Perhaps God created you with certain traits in order to reach a specific people.”

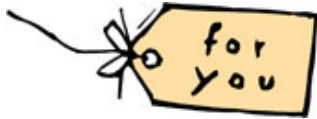
I glanced in the rearview mirror. Maybe my skin tone isn’t incidental, I smiled. My olive complexion and dark hair have certainly been a plus. These traits allow me to blend in where we minister in Latin America. Even my personality seems Latin!

As I listened to the preacher, I realized that Paul looked beyond his reflection in the mirror at all the other components of his life. He anticipated God would use him as he is, every unique detail, for His purpose.

The radio preacher challenged me with Paul’s assumption. Why not expect God to use all the ingredients that make up me? After all, they are as distinct as the features on my face.

Don't worry about anything; instead, "Pray about everything..."

Philippians 4: 6



D ANYWHERE, SEEING HIM EVERYWHERE

THE GIFT

Carla passed briefly across the landscape of my life, leaving me a legacy.

At the time, Roger & I were missionaries in Ecuador. My friend Carla asked if I would be her prayer partner. Once a week we would meet in my living room for an hour of sharing. Then we got on our knees and talked to the Lord. Those Thursday mornings were a heartfelt commitment on Carla's part. If she detected my faltering enthusiasm, she never let on. I relished Carla's friendship, but prayer certainly wasn't my strong suit.

Each time we met for prayer, Carla would rehearse God's specific answers to her requests over the years. Why would she not pray about everything? She was motivated by delightful pragmatism, not staunch discipline.

Our weekly get-togethers ended abruptly when Carla moved to Italy. I felt like a child, weaned prematurely. Her example was like a farewell gift left there in front of me, to open on my own and imitate. How could I ever be as passionate about prayer? This gift seemed uniquely Carla's.

I determined to start somewhere. Why not mimic her spontaneity? Through this I recognized two possible responses to life: pray or worry.

My first steps in imitating Carla's spontaneity were indeed shaky. Eventually it became more natural to pray with others about their concerns, right on the spot. Opportunities appeared now that I specifically asked God for them. Prayer is becoming natural, almost like breathing.

Carla indeed left me a gift, an essential element for *no ordinary days!*

REFRESHER COURSE

... so that by
God's will I may
come to you with
joy and together
with you be
refreshed.
Romans 15:32



It was one o'clock in the morning. I slipped quietly into the next room and spread my notes out on the desk. Once again, insecurity gripped me over the approaching conference with pastors' wives in

Mexico, where I was to be the keynote speaker. These women looked forward to a brief vacation and spiritual renewal. It seemed unfair that I was the only one in knots!

Traveling to Guadalajara alone was less intimidating than the presentation itself. I grappled with my lack of confidence.

At three a.m. I opened my Bible and began reading in Romans. Paul also planned a trip. He expected to be personally refreshed along with those who would receive him. Refreshed. God used that one word like a promise, reshaping my expectations. I suddenly felt surprisingly tranquil. I gathered my outline into a folder, closed it, and went back to bed.

What a terrific time at the retreat! I enjoyed it as much as the other ladies. What's more, I've been enjoying my ministry with new enthusiasm ever since. Why should everyone else have all the fun?

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8

RELIEF WORK



Roger and I ducked into the ramshackle taxi that would take us from the airport to our students in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. I practiced my Spanish with the driver along the

way . . .

“Have you heard the good news?”

“What’s that?” he asked, glancing at me in his rearview mirror.

“Jesus died to save sinners!”

He eagerly agreed. Come to find out, Pedro also knew his sins were forgiven in Jesus. He pointed to the wide highway nearby. “That’s where we have our yearly Jesus March. There are so many believers in Tegucigalpa now, even the government has taken notice!” he beamed.

“How did you come to know Jesus?” We’re always fascinated by the unique story of each Christian.

Pedro spoke about a gripping fear he once had. In his youth, an encounter led him to suspect he might have contracted AIDS. For two years, any physical malaise hinted at his private fear.

One day, God mercifully arranged proof that Pedro did not have AIDS. He recognized it as God’s very personal attention to his secret dread. The

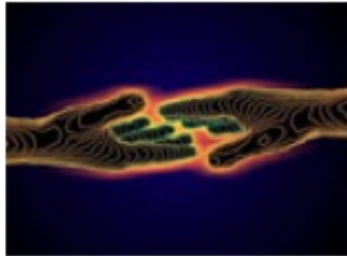
deep relief drove him to repentance and gratitude. Pedro committed his life to Christ.

We approached our destination. Pedro's final remark confirmed this was indeed a divine appointment between this driver and us. He said, "Because of the shameful details, I have told my story to only one other person, my pastor . . . ten years ago!"

... This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

Isaiah 66:2

THE DIGNITARY



Roger's cough hung on for weeks. We were living in Quito, Ecuador, and the regular puffs of ash from the nearby volcano were affecting his lungs.

One morning Edgar phoned. He had heard about Roger's persistent cough and was now on his way over to pray for him.

Without knowing Edgar, you might picture him driving up to our home like a pastor on a visit. Not so. Edgar lives in a house with dirt floors on the outskirts of Quito.

His family owns the property to their small home without running water. Neighbors, along with Edgar, fought hard for the rights to that turf fifteen years prior. In the battle, Edgar lost his right hand from a dynamite blast. His testimony begins from that very day he lost his hand. The tragic event turned him to Christ. Edgar's teachable spirit made him one of Roger's choicest men to mentor.

Edgar provides for his family by rising early to bake bread, then he sells it in the market . . . all this with only one hand.

To our house from Edgar's home entails three different buses and an uphill walk. This day outside our small gate, he removed his cap and pressed the

doorbell. As he entered our living room, he stammered an explanation:

“Roger, I am nothing. I’m not worthy to pray for you. Yet, I believe I should pray for your cough.”

“Heavenly Father, I am here to pray for my dear brother Roger. Who am I to pray for him? I have but one hand. I lay it now on Roger. Please hear my petition and heal my precious brother. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God heard and healed. We heard and were humbled.

I the LORD
search the
heart . . .

Jeremiah 17:10

MAP OF THE HEART



from the
mile further on is the turn-off heading directly south. We meant to take
that route back to Florida, but we missed the sign.

I'll never look at a map of east Georgia
the same. I can easily identify two routes
that form a perfect box. One road led
sleepy town where we spent the night. A

Roger and I were already edgy from the rough weekend. We had scurried
up to Georgia because a hurricane threatened Florida, where we lived.
That night the hurricane wobbled around the tip of Florida instead and
now seemed to be hunting us out in Georgia. Once again, we tossed our
suitcase into the car and hurried back to Florida, hoping to skirt its
threats along the way.

Following the map, my frustration began to build. Ten minutes outside of
town, we realized we had overshot the direct road south. The route we
were now on seemed to mock us. Lengthy right angles eventually led to the
very point as the more direct route we'd missed.

I secretly fretted over the extra forty minutes tacked on to the trip. Wasn't
God sovereign? Why this waste? Why didn't either of us notice the sign
ten minutes back, and why was Roger so calm?

I checked the map again. Maybe there was a cut-off further up. No, we
were doomed to this pathetic country road.

I glanced up from the map and noticed golden hay bales neatly placed along rolling fields. What a refreshing contrast to the hurricane confusion of yesterday! Roger's attitude seemed to match the scenery.

I put the map away. It was my heart that had taken the long way around. God was giving us a gift . . . the peaceful view beyond the windshield.

When I see that small square on a map of Georgia, I'm amused. Not only did I fail to see the sign, I almost missed God in the detour!

SERENADE

I summon . . . a man
to fulfill my
purpose. Is. 46:11



Have you ever been serenaded? It's a charming Latin American tradition. to surprise a friend with

Musicians are hired beautiful music, sometimes in the dead of night.

Roger and I were serenaded once, at an unexpected moment.

We were in Ecuador, selling our belongings in order to change mission fields. We decided to pare down to a couple of suitcases. Three days later, our liquidation resembled a home invasion. Each night after bargain hunters dispersed from sifting through our belongings, we fell wearily into bed . . . a bed that was no longer ours. It too had been sold. We were merely using it until our departure.

By the third evening, the bargain hunters had petered out. Our every exhausted step reverberated through the empty house. Suddenly, the doorbell startled us! Yet another bargain hunter at this hour?

On the stoop stood an Ecuadorian pastor hugging a guitar under one arm. His smile lit up the darkness as he greeted us warmly with his free arm.

We ushered him into our empty living room. How do we properly receive a guest without even a chair? The pastor casually positioned himself on the edge of a step as though not noticing the barren room. He placed his

guitar on one knee and, with closed eyes, began to sing. Worship songs filled the house.

Roger's eyes met mine. They were moist. Music was massaging our deep weariness.

This clearly was no ordinary serenade. Looking back we see God's fingerprint on our doorbell that night. For at the perfect moment, He had brought us His servant with a song.

Your attitude should be
the same as that of Christ
Jesus:

He made himself
nothing...being found in
appearance as a man, he
humbled himself. . .

Philippians 2:5-7

CURB APPEAL



Jesus LIVES HERE

This tiny sign would
fit neatly just above
the doorbell as a
dedication of our new

home. I carefully pressed its sticky backing onto the stucco. Immediately, insecurities began to mock me . . .

Does this mean my house should be immaculate at all times? Shouldn't my hair be just so when I answer the doorbell? And the yard leading up to the little sign—what does that say about us? Perhaps I should reconsider this audacious claim: 'Jesus Lives Here.'

Many years have passed with that sign clinging ft tenaciously to our entry, despite hurricanes and second thoughts. We now greet most of our neighbors by name. The postman sometimes stops at the door with a package. Despite my efforts, I can't avoid him catching us off guard. I answer the doorbell and realize the living room behind me looks a little too lived in. When I inquire about his sore knee, he thanks me for our concern, oblivious to the living room backdrop.

Recently, I polished the words on our little plaque. I saw them in a new light. Perhaps our neighbors prefer to know the approachable, fully human Jesus . . . the One they can relate to in ordinary ways, on ordinary days.

. . . You are familiar
with all my ways.
Before a word is on
my tongue
you know it
completely, O LORD.
Psalm 139: 3,4



THE CALENDAR

Roger and I were waiting for the second leg of our trip from Ecuador to Mexico. An overnight stay in Miami was an unavoidable part of the itinerary. It was terrific to set foot in the U.S. after three years. However, we felt frustrated. Our hotel near the airport was nowhere near anything.

I joked to Roger that we should rent a car just to go buy a simple calendar. The type of calendar I like is shaped like a checkbook, sold anywhere in the U.S., yet unavailable in Ecuador.

Early the next morning a shuttle returned us to the airport. When we reached Mexico later that day, we settled into the guestroom of our host at the seminary. Over the next days, Roger would teach the students, while I would do a seminar for pastors' wives from the nearby city.

Imagine my disappointment when only one lady showed up! Someone had dropped the ball. The ladies from the city were unaware of my conference. Only Rosa had overheard mention of it from the seminary. I resolved to teach her alone, hiding my disappointment.

Rosa and I were quickly at ease. She began to open up about her goals, struggles, and prayer concerns.

The second morning, I was having my quiet time at the dining table. My mind was plagued by doubts. Was it a giant mistake for me to be here? Only one lady and so much preparation on my part . . . Our host came into the dining room just as I pondered that question.

“Could you use one of these?” he asked. An object landed softly on the table beside me. A checkbook calendar!

I was stunned. My host figured what he gave me was rather ordinary. To me, it was a tailor made confirmation that God sees me. I was exactly where He wanted me.

IMPROMPTU PROMPTINGS

My Father is
always at work . . .
John 5:17



Traveling by plane is a major element of my ministry. At first glance, seating arrangements appear to be random.

One day, a handwritten note changed that perception.

The passenger in the next seat asked how I had become a missionary. Our conversation seemed divinely navigated all the way to Atlanta. Despite interruptions over the intercom, Tom kept returning to the point where we left off in our conversation. He was keenly interested in how to know God's forgiveness. By the time we landed, I had made a commitment to pray for him as he read through the Gospel of John over the following days.

Upon landing, I reached toward the overhead compartment for my case. The couple seated just ahead helped retrieve it for me, at the same time slipping a folded note into my hand.

It read, "We are Christians too. We have been praying for your conversation with that gentleman the entire trip."

God is not arbitrary. "My Father is always at work" . . . right down to the seating arrangement on flight #157.

FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOWN

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Mathew 18:20



The hospital gown doesn't adequately cover me, even wrapped around three times. I'm alone in the waiting room musing over why they even bothered with the flowered print.

Underneath I'm conscious of my nakedness. Deeper still, I'm exposed to a fresh dependence on God. He alone decrees the outcome of this appointment.

A pamphlet nearby addresses breast cancer. I used it for a fan at first. Then I glance at the words inside. They predict I'll need to adjust to a 'new normal.' Though my cancer is non-invasive, I am already aware of the need to bow before God's sovereignty.

I recall the moment I got the news and how quickly God showed me Psalms 112:7-8: "He does not fear bad news, nor live in dread of what may happen. For he is settled in his mind that Jehovah will take care of him." In the place of dread, He granted a settled mind that He would take care of me. This is my 'new normal.'

Jill now entered the waiting room, dressed in a similarly faded gown. I soon learn she is a pastor's wife. Despite recurring breast cancer, her smile is radiant, and her lips form words to match. She tells me about her church, how she came to know the Lord, and God's absolute goodness to her. In an instant, we become sisters of the gown.

We have two things in common: cancer and Christ. We take a minute to pray together before the nurse appears. In that brief moment, the faded print and the flimsy fit of hospital attire turn into the designer wardrobe . . . the *fellowship of the gown*.

. . . like Sarah . . .

you are her
daughters if you
do what is right
and do not give
way to fear.

1 Peter 3:6

family,

outreach in a distant village. It is pitch dark when suddenly the car's headlights quit. To add to the drama, this region's crime statistics are world-renowned.

BACKGROUND MUSIC



Imagine traveling on a rural highway in South Africa. We were squeezed into a pastor's tiny car along with his young returning from an evangelistic

We were still miles from Cape Town. Roger was in the passenger seat beside the African pastor. I was tucked in back between the pastor's wife, Mary, and their children. The car limped forward slowly, as though feeling its way with difficulty through the darkness. We were now invisible to speeding traffic. I was dreading an impending crash from behind.

Mary, on my left, did something unexpected. She began to sing. Her children, on my other side, joined in. "Lord, we lift your name on high; Lord, we love to sing your praises. . . ." No one spoke of imminent danger.

I didn't know all the words but joined in the melody. I wasn't paying much attention to the words anyway. Instead, I was observing Mary's reaction to this predicament. As a mother, she had much at stake in an accident. She wasn't reacting like I'd expect.

The contrast to my internal fear was striking. Only God knew my inner panic

at that moment. Shouldn't my heart be settled on His goodness and control? It seemed He had turned off the headlights to draw me into a classroom. During the hour it took us to make it safely back, I was observing a homeschool lesson at its best: solid faith put to music.

Mary's kids knew their mother well. This song was typical of her. They knew every word by heart, taught by Mary's life.

Blessed be the
Lord, who daily
loads us with
benefits, the God
of our salvation!
Psalm 68:19



THE YAPA

(Quito, Ecuador...)

As missionaries in Ecuador, we delighted over the endless variety of fruit offered at Aproned women would flatter me. “What

the market.
does my lovely lady wish?”

Once the price was settled and the fruit weighed, the vendor would surprise me with the “yapa,” an Indian word for bonus. An extra mango or apple would be slipped into my bag.

(A few years later in Miami...)

It was Saturday and perfect weather. We would drive over to Bayside Marketplace to watch boats and people along the water’s edge. I gathered up loose change from a bedside drawer. This overlooked treasure could satisfy the hungry parking meter.

A sign at the parking lot explained there was a four-dollar fee. A machine at the entry receives the coins and spits out a ticket. Roger carefully selected out our pennies first, then the nickels. It was a slow process, and we were only up to two dollars when we noticed a man patiently waiting to use the machine.

I explained apologetically how we never get the leisure to use up our pocket

change. “No hurry,” he smiled.

Then a breathless person appeared suddenly. “I caught you in time. Here, use my ticket! There are three hours left on it. Press that cancel button!

Sure enough, when we poked at the knob, it sounded like a jackpot! Our pocket change rushed back at us. We thanked the stranger as he waved goodbye. Meanwhile, the man waiting nearby had witnessed the scene.

“That won’t happen twice in Miami!” he said dryly.

His attitude surprised me. I told him I meet terrific people everywhere in Miami.

“When did you get here, five minutes ago?” he jokingly retorted.

As Roger and I strolled over to the market, we smiled over what just occurred. What others might consider a fluke has become what we recognize as “the yapa” from our Heavenly Father. After all, with Him there are no ordinary days.

About the Author

Dianne Smalling is a missionary with her husband, Roger. They work throughout Latin America in leadership training.



Dianne is editor of their extensive literature ministry available at www.smallings.com. The Smallings' books are available on Amazon [KINDLE](#)

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