

God, Deliver Us from the Ordinary
Romans 12:9-21
7-19-2026

In 1977 theologian Ron Sider published his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* which Christianity Today has listed as one of the 100 most influential religious books of the 20th century and the 7th most influential book in the evangelical world in the last 50 years. In it he argued that while the Bible is full of instructions to care for the poor and warns against being seduced by riches, it's been statistically proven that the richer we become, the less we give to help those in need.

As the 20th Century was nearing its close, the Christian Century named Ron Sider one of the 12 most influential persons in the US in the area of religion.

Yet in spite of these accolades, Sider, who died in 2022, was frequently surrounded by controversy, attacked for his pointed commentary on ways he saw Christians compromising and conforming to the world by adopting its values and attitudes instead of offering an alternative by following Paul's injunction to be set apart from it, transformed by the renewing of our mind.

He argued that too often the evangelical church in America has sold out to our culture. Our politics and decisions are not guided by the need for justice, compassion, and care which God's word clearly says they should be, but often by business and economic concerns instead.

Insisting that our Christian faith must not just affect our personal morality and piety, but also our politics and economics.

In his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World*, he argued that the consciences of most believers have been bought by our surrounding cultural forces, that we have simply adopted our societies values without question and as a result we accept the world's definition of what is normal and ordinary.

Too often it's accepted as just the way things are.

The dictionary defines normal as conforming to what is expected and typical
While ordinary means that which is common and customary.
But what is normal and ordinary in the world in which we live?

- We follow the one who valued people so much that when he saw a blind man in need on the road to Jericho or Zacheus hanging from the tree just hoping to catch a glimpse of him, he thought nothing of stopping the crowds to talk with them. Yet many consider it normal and ordinary and therefore acceptable that people are so busy scrolling and texting and checking their Facebook page on their iPhones, that they seem oblivious to those sitting right there next to them.

Spending countless hours before electronic gadgets that largely isolate us from face-to-face social interaction.

- **We serve a Lord who clothes the lilies of the field in more glory than all of Solomon's riches and tells us we don't need to store up treasures on earth which never last but store up treasures in heaven. Yet many consider it normal and ordinary and acceptable that the almighty dollar gets the last word when making decisions and choices because that's how the world operates.**
- **Our Lord is called the great Physician who heals the sick and even raised the dead.** Yet because of the cost, it's become too easy to accept that over 600,000 will die and almost 250 million become seriously ill each year from Malaria, a preventable disease.
- **We worship the one who is the bread of life and was able to feed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and couple of fish.** Yet through lack of action again, it's become acceptable that 9 million people, mostly children, die each year from hunger related causes. Another 733 million go hungry each day, and 2.8 billion cannot afford a healthy diet even though the world produces enough food to be able to feed them all.
- **Our Lord walked on water and calmed the sea with just a word and who death itself could not hold.** Yet many think it is normal and ordinary to look to presidents and political parties, bombs and bank accounts instead for their security.

God deliver us from the normal and ordinary, at least as the world understands them!

Jesus' call to follow is to become extraordinary, to go beyond and redefine what is normal and ordinary

As we return again to Romans 12:9-21, Paul describes what is to be our new normal and ordinary

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the

contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:9–21)

In the second and third centuries, it was normal and ordinary for the people of Rome to throw their unwanted babies off bridges to drown in the river below. And they couldn't understand why Christians would take boats out into those waters to rescue and care for these babies as their own. Why would they do that unless they had a very different understanding of what is normal and ordinary.

When plague hit an area, the ordinary response was to flee. It was normal to find masses of people fleeing the cities, abandoning their homes and sick loved ones for the safety of the countryside. They couldn't understand why so many Christians stayed put, putting their own lives in peril to care for the sick and dying.

There is even a letter from a Roman general to his superiors in Rome who describes one such plague and doesn't understand why, when the politicians all fled, the Romans legions pulled back to safety, and families abandoned their loved ones, yet a sect known as Christians stayed put to take care of those left behind. Why would they do that?

The early church had a very different definition of what is normal and ordinary. It was one in which compassion and caring for the least and the lost, putting the needs of their neighbor above their own safety and comfort which played a central role. And it was this which many historians credit with literally changing the world.

I was talking with a young man some time back who couldn't understand why we should spend so much time and energy on ministry to the poor and needy outside of the church when there were so many needs inside of it. He referred to John 20 where one of the disciples wanted to scold a woman for wasting valuable perfume by pouring it on Jesus' head when they could have sold it and the money given to the poor. Instead, Jesus commended her and said the poor and needy would always be among us.

He felt this proved his point as he then captured well the normal and ordinary view of the world well when he said, “We have to take care of ourselves first.” Then, when we are healthy then we can take care of others. He couldn't understand why we would do it any other way.

But if we wait till this happens, we will never get around to serving others because there is always going to be something else which comes up, some new crisis or personal need or desire we are reacting to.

Yet in Luke 12:48 Jesus said, ***“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”***

Why we serve and minister gets at the heart of what is to be normal and ordinary in the Kingdom of God.

1. We could do it out of guilt

After all, look at all we have and enjoy materially.

We are the richest nation in history, consuming far more than any other

Most of us live not just in abundance but in waste

We throw away more than most people in the world have to live on

We don't fight over food, instead we've reached the point where we see news stories of shoppers getting in fights over things as silly as the latest video game

- If guilt is our motivator we could talk about the billions spent on weight control and diets while over 700 million go to bed hungry every night
- Billions spent on the latest gadgets that fill our homes but then sit unused while there remains a crisis of homelessness, many of them families with children
- or the billions lost on gambling in an effort to get rich quick, while one in four children in the US live in poverty
- And we could talk about all that we are not doing, even the most basic things to care for our neighbor

Guilt can be a great motivator but it is not why we serve others, in itself it is not adequate

If we try to make it so, then ministry becomes merely a release valve

Once we give something, do something to help we can easily think we did our good deed for the day and feel good about it and then leave it at that till the next time our guilt becomes unbearable

2. Or we could serve and minister out of pity

If I wanted to motivate you to do something to help the needy, I could show pictures of what hunger looks like, emaciated bodies of children and elderly in third world countries, those ravaged by war

I could go into graphic detail about the plight of inner-city families, the consequences of drug addiction and plight of unwed mothers and single parent families, of those caught in sex trafficking

Or the dangers and severe hardships women and children are willing to face fleeing wars in Africa and cartels in South America, in the hope of finding refuge in countries they know don't want them.

Like guilt, pity can be a great motivator, if we are not moved by such pictures and descriptions something is wrong

But again, in itself, pity is not adequate

This has been proven by studies on how responsive people are when confronted by such pictures and natural disasters on a regular basis

In time we can become immune to them, tired of the pictures and the problems and begin to tune them out

There is even a term for this, it's called **compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress disorder** defined as a loss of sympathy for the suffering of others.

While it is most commonly found in caregivers, increasingly it is also seen in the response of people frequently exposed to reports and pictures of suffering.

Giving to disaster relief actually decreases.

3. We could also minister and serve out of a sense of obligation

There are so many scriptural passages which command us to help the poor and needy and those who are less fortunate. To welcome the stranger and foreigner, or as Paul says in verse 13, practice hospitality, which is a reference to strangers not friends and family.

It is our Christian duty to care and as able, to help

Jesus called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs, those who look good on the outside, have all the outward appearances of godliness and holiness but inside he said they were filled with dead men's bones, unwilling to lift a finger to help others

Throughout the OT God is seen as having special care for those in need, for the widows and the orphans, the strangers and the sick

As followers of Christ, we do have an obligation but here to this can only take you so far

We might go through the motions but our hearts not be in it

In the end it can lead to a form of good works in which we think we are okay with God simply because of what we do

4. And then we could also serve out of self interest

Doing good, saying the right things because of how it makes us feel, so others will think more highly of us

Telling people what they want to hear to get what we want, not because it is the right thing to do

Jesus warned of this in the Sermon on the Mount when he said be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them. If you

do, you will have no reward from your father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be done in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:1-4

Guilt, pity, obligation, self-interest are all reasons some may minister and serve and there may be a place for them

- I should feel guilty when I am so self-centered that all my time and attention and resources are spent on me while so many are in need
- I should hurt for others when I see or hear the conditions they face
- I do have an obligation to care and as we are able, to help
- It is okay to feel good when I have made a difference in someone else's life

But there is another reason we do it, one which will not change with emotions, which can cause us to help even when we may not feel like it or agree with the lifestyle of those we may be helping or even when we are uncomfortable

It is the same reason which would cause God, the creator of the universe to send his own son

Cause him to give up the riches of heaven to live among us as a man

To face all the abuse and problems common to man, to identify with us in our pain, to face hunger and weariness and loss and rejection

To get himself dirty by associating with those no one else would talk to or touch, those no one else would get near

To go through the cross to pick us up and carry us to safety, paying the ultimate sacrifice for us on Calvary

It is the motive we know so well at least in theory

5. We minister and serve out of love!

- **For God so loved the world he gave us his son**
- **God demonstrated his love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**
- **the greatest commands are to love God and love our neighbor – they go together – true love for God must be expressed in love for people**
- **Jesus said the world will know we are his followers by our love for others – it is the mark of his followers**
- **And John said we can't really love God unless we have love for others**

The two go hand in hand and as Paul says here in Romans, that love must be sincere

what qualifies you and I for ministry is not our perfection but our love for Jesus and for others. Jesus said if you love me then take care of my sheep!

Ministry and service are a demonstration of that love, without it, our acts are nothing more than good deeds

When Mother Teresa was ministering to the poorest of the poor in Calcutta India a rich American businessman went to visit her. As he watched he couldn't comprehend her fierce commitment to what he considered the dregs of Calcutta so he asked her about it. She said, "We are a contemplative order. First, we meditate of Jesus, and then we go out and look for him in disguise."

Not a bad understanding of ministry, Jesus said when we do it for the least we do it to him.

love must be sincere, literally without hypocrisy
It must not be just a mask we wear, a part we play
As NLT puts it, don't just pretend to love others. Really love them

And to help us do that and enable serve them, Paul says he gives us the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This point is made even more forcefully in 1 Corinthians 12-14, the longest discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in the NT

In chapter 12 he lists the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 14 he writes about the proper use of those gifts

And right between the two is that great chapter on love

Thus, that great chapter we use for love and marriage is actually a passage about ministry and service

there is a strong correlation between love and the use of the gifts
It becomes the primary motivation for action, what Paul calls the most excellent way because it is of greatest service to others

In the final days of the Roman Empire, status was often conveyed by the number of carved statues of the gods people displayed in their homes. The more wealth, the more statues they had.

As with every industry there were both good and bad sculptors. As people became more and more greedy, the bad got away with as much as they could. They discovered that cracks and chips in marble could be covered up quite easily and convincingly with wax and began passing off defective statues as top quality.

The buyers would then take them home and display them, usually in the sunlight where they could be easily seen. But as the wax heated up it would melt and all the defects become obvious.

To get a statue that was authentic and of fine quality done by reputable artists, you had to go to the artisan marketplace in the Roman Quad and look for booths with signs declaring two words, sine cera which meant without wax.

From this some believe we get the word sincere

Paul said love must be sincere, be authentic, literally without hypocrisy
All the gifts in the world won't matter without it
If we are not sincere in our caring and serving others will know it

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:9–21)

And may God deliver us from anything less than His view of what is to be normal and ordinary