

JOHN BEVERE

Best-Selling Author of *The Bait of Satan*



Extraordinary

The Life You're Meant to Live

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P R E S S

EXTRAORDINARY
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Extraordinary

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NLT).

These words paint a picture of an unimaginable and extraordinary existence, one far beyond what any mere mortal has known or experienced. You may have heard these words before and related them only to heaven’s glory. But in actuality, they were penned for the here and now! For the writer, the apostle Paul, continues, “But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his Spirit” (verse 10, NLT).

Paul, who lived during the church’s inception, was divinely moved to bring into the open what had been previously hidden to our eyes, ears, and imagination. He also wrote the following to describe the mandate of his life:

My task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along. Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, this *extraordinary* plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels! (Ephesians 3:9–10, MSG)

There’s One Person above all others who desires an extraordinary life for you. He is a Father who delights, like any good father, in the achievements and happiness of His children. His name is God! And nothing will please Him more than seeing you reach your highest potential.

God’s extraordinary plan is revealed when we live extraordinarily. Together let’s give the angels something to talk about!

EXTRAORDINARY

Extraordinary. Just hearing this amazing word arouses the desire to surpass the norm, to break away from the status quo. Its definition is “beyond what is usual, exceptional, exceeding the common measure.” One-word synonyms include *remarkable*, *amazing*, *marvelous*, and *unimaginable*. To better understand the full meaning of this inspiring word, consider its antonyms: *common*, *normal*, and *usual*.

Ponder this a moment: the opposite of extraordinary is *normal*! If we’re honest, I think we all want our lives to mean more or be more than what we’ve known and seen. Unless it’s suppressed, there is an innate desire in each of us to rise above commonness. We yearn for the extraordinary.

The most loved popular films that have captured the hearts and attention of the public involve extraordinary powers. There’s *Spider-Man*, *Superman*, *The Incredible Hulk*, the Star Wars saga, the Lord of the Rings trilogy, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Matrix*, *Fantastic Four*, *The Incredibles*, *X-Men*, *Harry Potter*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and that’s not all of them. Add to this mix the movies with extraordinary heroes who do remarkable feats and live exceptional lives, characters such as Batman, Iron Man, Indiana Jones, Zorro, William Wallace, Robin Hood, Spartacus, Sergeant York, just to name a few. In fact, as of 2009, seventeen of the top twenty-five all-time blockbuster movies fall under these categories. That’s almost 70 percent, and the percentage varies only slightly if you extend the poll to the top fifty.

How intriguing that the bulk of the most popular movies of all time are not love stories, murder mysteries, espionage thrillers, war movies, true life accounts, sports flicks, westerns, police stories, or dramas of friendship, family, or life in general. No, the top box office draws are films that center on extraordinary characters doing remarkable feats, with a good number of them possessing beyond-human abilities or powers. Why? Because “extraordinary” is how we were created to live. It was God’s plan from the beginning.

CHRISTIANITY'S IMAGE

Unfortunately, God's plan and man's execution of the plan are often not the same. One of the main reasons I avoided Christianity for years was its portrayal. I, like so many others, saw men of God as Bible-thumping critics who were quick to judge the flaws of others. Or they were passive, backward, and ignorant. The idea that Christians were pioneers who lived and thought outside the box, behaving in extraordinary ways, never crossed my mind. And the idea of Christian women? Well, it was even worse. I perceived that they had no say in important matters, dressed unfashionably, and neglected their appearance. It was frowned upon for a godly woman to venture beyond her domestic duties and certainly unheard of for her to lead in any way. As a young man, I didn't want my wife forbidden to think and restricted from joining me in life's ventures. I didn't want a woman who was suppressed—I wanted one full of life!

I viewed Christianity as lifeless. Becoming a believer would mean losing my individuality and forgoing creativity, excellence, passion, and the ability to succeed in the marketplace, sports, politics, education, and other arenas of life. I didn't know it then, but my views were the opposite of how God created us to live, because He is the One who breathed into us the desire for the extraordinary. Listen to God Himself:

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them
reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."
God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.

He created them male and female.

God blessed them:

“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!” (Genesis 1:26–28, MSG)

We were made to reflect God’s nature. He spoke both to men and women, saying, “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!” Adam, the first man, named every species of animal on the earth (I’m sure his wife would have been involved, but she hadn’t been created yet!). God brought the animals to Adam and gave him the responsibility of naming them. There are over one million species of animals on earth. Not only did Adam have the creativity to name them all, but he also had the capacity to remember each one. That was an extraordinary man doing a remarkable feat!

You may ask, “But since Adam fell, weren’t those abilities lost due to his disobedience?” No, Jesus flipped the mess Adam created for humankind. Paul wrote, “Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into *life!*” (Romans 5:18, MSG). The word *life* doesn’t merely describe the way we’ll live in heaven; it also means the “here and now.” Jesus not only recovered what Adam lost, but He also provided so much more—the potential of an extraordinary life!

The truth is, *God not only desires you to live extraordinarily but also has equipped you to do so.* Don’t ever forget these words. Etch them on the tablet of your heart. A remarkable, amazing, extraordinary life is not restricted to certain individuals or professions. It doesn’t matter who you are or how you serve in life. If you’re a schoolteacher, businessperson, government leader, stay-at-home mom, athlete, factory worker, hairstylist, student, pastor (the list is endless), it doesn’t matter, because you were created for extraordinary achievements in that role. The power to accomplish remarkable feats and live an exceptional life is not tied to an occupation but to a disposition of the heart. This is not only God’s will but also His great pleasure.

Hollywood, religious people, and our culture had painted for me a warped and limited image of God’s people. Why did I have this distortion? God, you, and

I have a common enemy named Satan, who is called “the ruler of this world,” “the prince of the power of the air,” and “the god of this world.” He controls the world’s systems and influences the minds of those who do not belong to God. He has billions of fallen angels and demons to carry out his grand strategy. The sad fact is that too often the church has limited Satan’s chief strategy to certain behaviors, like trying to get people to drink alcohol or watch dirty sex scenes in movies. He’s much more crafty than that and uses a wide variety of snares and diversions. We’ve missed his primary purpose. Because what he fears most is Christians discovering who God’s made them to be—extraordinary people with abilities to carry out remarkable and unusual feats. This should be the image society has of Christians.

In contrast to the present reputation of Christians, one of the great struggles the early church encountered was convincing people that believers were not superheroes or gods. Cornelius, an officer in the most powerful army in the world, bowed down to worship Peter and his companions. Stunned, Peter immediately replied, “Stand up; I myself am also a man” (Acts 10:26).

In a city named Lystra, the mob “went wild, calling out in their Lyconian dialect, ‘The gods have come down! These men are gods!’” Paul sharply corrected them: “What do you think you’re doing! We’re not gods!” (Acts 14:11, 14, MSG). When Paul was on Malta collecting firewood, a poisonous snake bit him. He shook it off, and the inhabitants anticipated his death. “But when it was obvious he wasn’t going to, they jumped to the conclusion that he was a god!” (28:6, MSG).

Unbelievers said of the early church, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (17:6). Christians were held in high esteem by their society. It’s recorded the entire city of Jerusalem’s attitude toward the church was that “everyone had high regard for them” (5:13, NLT). In our generation may we each live in such a way to recover that kind of respect for the church.

A JOURNEY

In the pages that follow, we will embark on a journey to fully understand the extraordinary way God wants us to live. I urge you not to skim through material or skip around because each chapter builds on the last.

I don't want you to experience what I did a number of times when I was growing up. Periodically I would come in late to a movie my entire family had been watching. One evening I walked into our TV room just as *West Side Story* was ending. The lead male character was dying and saying his last, climactic words. My mother, dad, sisters, and I had witnessed this scene together, but the impact it had on me was completely different. I couldn't understand why my mother and sisters were crying. Even my dad was somber and saddened. But because I had come in late, I thought, *What's the big deal?* The same scene that riveted my parents and sisters had no effect on me because I hadn't journeyed with them through the entire movie.

I don't want the same thing to happen for you with the message of this book. It's a progressive revelation that has the potential to ruin you forever for the ordinary. I speak from experience, because as I sought God, researched, wrote, and prayed over this book, I was changed forever!

As you make this journey with me, you'll not only know that you were created for the extraordinary, but you'll actually understand how to live it. Before we begin, let's pray together for God to reveal His desire and quicken yours.

Dear God, I ask as I read this book that Your Holy Spirit will teach me. I pray that I will come to know what is the richness and enormity of the calling You've placed upon my life. I also want to know the power You've placed within me to accomplish this calling and to bring glory to Your name and joy to Your heart. You've placed me here for such a time as this. I pray this message would equip me to fulfill all the wonderful works You've planned for me to accomplish on this earth. It's in the name of Jesus Christ that I make this request. Amen.

You Are Loved

My wife, Lisa, and I have four sons who at the time of this writing range from fourteen to twenty-two years of age. A few years ago, while we were enjoying a meal together, I made this statement: “Guys, you can’t do anything to make your mother or me love you any more than we already love you. And conversely, you can’t do a thing to make your mother and me love you any less than we love you.”

I could see how my words made them glad and solidified their feelings of security. Who doesn’t want to feel loved by their mom and dad? What I said next, though, caught them off guard. “However, boys, you are in charge of how pleased your mom and I are with you.” Their smiles were replaced by more sober expressions. They realized that our pleasure in them was not unconditional, like our love, but was based on their behavior.

I know this may come as something of a shock, but the same is true of our relationship with God. We can’t do one thing to make God love us any more than He already does, and conversely, we can’t do anything to make Him love us any less. But how much pleasure will He feel from us? That’s another story.

In recent years we have heard a lot about the unconditional love of God—a very helpful and necessary discussion. However, many people have subconsciously concluded that since God loves them, He’s also pleased with them. This simply is not true.

So what’s involved in pleasing God? I believe that we all long to please God, in the same way that typical children are eager to please their parents. For decades I have prayed passionately, “Father, I want to please You the best way a man can please You!” This prayer coincides with what the apostle Paul wrote to every believer:

“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9).

The key phrase is “well pleasing.” How are we not just “pleasing” but “well pleasing” to God? And how does He respond when we please Him in that way?

I will spend much of this book explaining the answer. But first let’s make sure we understand the staggering depth of God’s love for us.

I’ll explain.

GOD’S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FOR EACH OF US

God’s love for us is unconditional and unchanging. This is clearly seen in the words of Jesus’ prayer the night before His crucifixion: “Then the world will know that you [God the Father] sent me [Jesus Christ] and will understand that you love them as much as you love me” (John 17:23, NLT).

Did you catch that? God loves you *as much as* He loves Jesus! That’s almost too much to comprehend.

Maybe you’re thinking, *Jesus must have only meant the disciples who were seated around the table at the Last Supper since, after all, they spread the gospel to the known world and all but one were martyred for their faith.* If you’re thinking that, you’re using someone’s behavior as a basis for God’s love. That’s not true. His love for us is separate from what we do for Him.

Another objection to this depth of love might be stated this way: *This was a group of special men chosen by God and placed on earth at that time for Him to love more than the rest of the human race.* That is definitely not true because in the same prayer Jesus also said, “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony” (John 17:20, NLT). If you believe in Jesus Christ, you do so either directly or indirectly because of the testimony of these disciples. These men penned the very words of the New Testament, which you have read yourself or heard repeated by someone who shared the gospel with you. You would not be a believer in Jesus Christ without their testimony.

Another common objection to the magnitude of this love goes like this: *Yes, I can possibly believe that God may once have loved me in that unconditional way, but*

I've messed up so terribly since then that He certainly can't love me now as He did at first.

Another lie! Scripture records that God's love "is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening]. Love never fails [never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end]" (1 Corinthians 13:7–8, AMP). His love for you can never weaken or become obsolete. It is impossible, for His love for you isn't based on your behavior but on His character of faithfulness.

God's love for us is so all-encompassing that we simply cannot comprehend its scope. Let's document some facts about His love. He sent Jesus to die for us when we were still His enemies (see Romans 5:10). John the apostle writes, "For God so loved the world [you and me] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Why did God *give* Jesus? The answer is simple: to purchase us back. Our forefather Adam gave up himself and consequently all his offspring (including you and me) to a new lord when he heeded Satan's words in the Garden of Eden. Adam blatantly disobeyed God and separated himself and his descendants from their Creator.

But since God loved humankind so much, He wasn't willing to assign us the same fate as Satan and his angels (hell or the eternal lake of fire). God needed a creative plan to purchase our freedom. He did this by sending Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, who was fathered by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Jesus was all man and all God and lived a perfect life (the only man ever to walk the earth without sin). He went to the cross and paid the price for our disobedience to God. He took our judgment so that we wouldn't have to.

Nothing else could have purchased us, for God says, "Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly" (Psalm 49:6–8). The price of our soul is so expensive that nothing else could have bought us back besides Jesus Himself. Scripture states, "God bought you with a high price" (1 Corinthians 6:20, NLT). Then again it's recorded that the Father "is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son" (Ephesians 1:7, NLT).

No person or thing is more valuable to God than Jesus. Yet God saw our value equal to that of what He prized most. Now here is the amazing fact: If you and I had been worth one cent less to God than the value of Jesus, He would not have purchased us, because God would never make an unprofitable deal. God does not make bad purchases (Recall the above scripture, “God bought you with a high price.”) A bad purchase is when you give something of more value for something of less value. In God’s eyes, Jesus’ value is the same as yours!

Do you see how important you are to God? This is why Jesus prays, “You love them as much as you love me” (John 17:23, NLT). That’s extraordinary love!

JESUS’ LOVE FOR YOU

Not long after I gave my life to Christ, I had a surprising and riveting dialogue with the Lord. I heard no audible voice but was overwhelmed by a message that surfaced in my heart: *Do you know that I esteem you better than Myself?*

You can imagine how these words alarmed me. Was this the Enemy trying to sow a blasphemous or prideful thought in my mind? How could the One who made the universe and all that is within it tell me, a peon, that He considered me more valuable than Himself? I almost said, “Get behind me, Satan. You are an offense to me!” But somehow deep in my spirit I knew this was the voice of Jesus. But I still had to be sure, for even as a new believer I knew that the Word of God commands us to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1).

In thinking this through, I replied, “Lord, I just cannot believe this unless You give me three scriptures of confirming evidence from the New Testament.” Saying this to God made me tremble, but I knew it was the right thing to do. And I soon sensed in my heart that the Lord had no problem with my request. In fact, I felt His pleasure with me for asking.

Almost immediately He responded, *What does Philippians 2:3 say?*

I knew this verse by heart, so I recited it back to Him, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

There is your first scripture, the Lord informed me.

I quickly countered, “No, Lord, Paul wasn’t speaking of You! He was instructing the Philippian believers to esteem each other better than themselves. He wasn’t discussing how You treat and esteem me.”

The answer came immediately: *I don’t tell My children to do anything that I don’t do Myself.*

Whoa. I was taken aback. The Lord had more.

That’s the difficulty with so many families, the Lord continued. *The parents tell their children to do things they themselves don’t do, or they tell them to not do things they do. Many parents tell their children not to fight, yet they regularly fight before them. Then the parents wonder why their children fight. I don’t do this. I do what I tell My children to do.*

I was still a little leery, so I said, “That is only one. I still need two others!”

I then heard Him ask in my heart, *Who hung on the cross, you or Me?*

I was stunned.

I hung on that cross, bearing your sins, sickness, disease, poverty, and judgment and finally died because I esteemed you better than Myself.

Peter’s words came to me: “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). I now realized I had surely heard from the Lord. He did esteem me more than Himself. Otherwise He would not have taken my judgment and died in my place.

I knew the final confirmation was on the way, and without having to ask I heard in my heart, *The third scripture is, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10). I am the firstborn of many brothers [see Romans 8:29], and I prefer in love my brothers and sisters better than Myself,* the Lord concluded.

Of course, this information I received applies to every child of God, so it’s all true for you too. He literally esteems each of us higher than Himself! That’s extraordinary love that is almost too wonderful to comprehend. So not only does God the Father love you as much as He loves Jesus, but Jesus loves you as much as and, yes, even more than Himself!

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, loves you with the same love as well, for He's the One who poured out the love of God in your heart when you gave your life to Jesus Christ (see Romans 5:5). This is why Paul says, "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit" (15:30). Notice that the Holy Spirit's love for us is identified in this scripture. This is why He will abide with us forever. It is His love for us that causes Him to remain. He is the Spirit of Love, for God is love.

God's love for you and me is indeed unconditional, unchanging, and will last forever. He loves each of us individually as much as He loves Jesus Christ. That is almost too wonderful to comprehend, but it's true, for God cannot lie. Anytime you feel unloved, identify the feeling or thought as a lie, reject it, and remind yourself of the supreme price paid to bring you back into your Father's arms. He longs for you with a never-ending love.

I don't want you to ever forget or doubt the love God has for you. It is not conditional—based on your performance or how good you've been. It's a constant love that never fades or ends. It should be the foundation of your life in Christ.



Reflections for an Extraordinary Journey

Do you really believe that God loves you unconditionally? Why or why not?

If you don't, is your belief based on feelings or on what God has spoken? If it's based on your feelings, do you believe that they can be inaccurate?

Make a firm decision to believe God's Word over what you feel. Praise and thank God now for His remarkable love!