



**AVERAGE
JOE**

**God's Extraordinary Calling
to Ordinary Men**

TROY MEEDER

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**MULTNOMAH
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For Kim.



For over three decades you have been at my side. We've climbed a hundred mountains, skied miles of back-country trails, played a thousand games of cribbage (I have lost most), and forged a life together. You are the love of my youth, the joy of my existence, and my very best friend. I can't imagine life without you.

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For Worm: You're the example of what honor, integrity, and resolve should look like. You're the best of men. *Ooh Rab!*

For Hollywood: In an environment riddled with compromise, you remain a man of faith.

For Dad: You've taught me what it means to be a man. I love you.

For Kep: I will never forget fishing on Shasta Lake. "I wanna be like you."

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For my Jesus: You have rescued a sinful man. If there's anything good in me, it's because of Your saving grace, precious blood, and never-ending patience. I will love You forever.



The Average Joe

It's Monday.

The beginning of another week of...normalcy. Life as an average Joe is once again about to start its familiar grind.

If you are like me, we go through the same—often life-numbing—motions every day. We crawl out of bed at 0-dark-thirty to the sound of a screaming alarm clock, then stub our toe on our kid's "perfect" Christmas gift—the very one that last year cost us two days' pay! The dog needs to go outside. The kids are asleep but will definitely need some "dad time" later. The washer that sprang a leak still needs repair. The milk in the fridge is sour. The next-door neighbor parked his extra car in front of our driveway—again.

Oh, man, this is not the life you and I probably thought we would live!



As a boy I certainly had bigger plans than working in a cramped cubicle from eight to five, building widgets on the late shift at the local mill, or flipping burgers at the corner diner. My boyhood dreams never included a mortgage, diapers, traffic tickets, or cleaning out the gutters. Perhaps, like you, I dreamed of saving a life, flying a fighter jet, finding a cure for cancer, or even walking on the moon.

As boys, we had such high hopes to accomplish something great, to make a difference, to live a life that left a mark on those around us. We marveled at men like Chuck Yeager, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and the Reverend Billy Graham. We wanted to ride like John Wayne, lead like Ronald Reagan, drive like Mario Andretti, and win like the 1973 Miami Dolphins. All of us longed to be James Bond; instead we ended up looking and acting a bit like Archie Bunker.

Maybe you are asking the same question I ask: *What happened to my life?*

What happened for most of us is *reality*. Instead of finding fame and fortune, normalcy and “never enough” found us. We are average Joes, but is that really a problem? Definitely not! So-called average Joes are the ones who make the world work.

God seems to have a special fondness for average Joes. Before they accomplished extraordinary deeds, normal guys like Gideon, David, Peter, and Paul went about their farming, sheep herding, fishing, and tent making. Even Jesus, our Redeemer, Healer, and coming King, started out using a hammer and saw in a carpenter’s shop.

You’ll find average Joes are everywhere. Good men, honest men. They are hard working, genuine, and steadfast. More often than not, they are absent from the great halls of debate, the ivory towers of scholastic achievement, or the family trees of aristocracy. Instead they mow grass, sell insurance, build furniture, drive trucks, manage restaurants, and fix plumbing. They can be found serving coffee at the local diner, selling tires, or pastoring a small church. In our hurried pace we often pass them by as we rush off to our next appointment or event.

I suppose we might find an average Joe on Wall Street or in a government building in Washington DC, but if we did, he might be there only to fix, paint, or build something. Sometimes looked down upon, even dismissed as “less than,” average Joes are the stable, dependable, resolute backbone of an ever-so-wavering society.

In a day when compromise and political correctness rule, these simple men—average Joes—seek truth and have an unshakable commitment to doing what is right. Ask them their opinion, and you will get an earful of resolute beliefs in God, country, and family. Strong in character, integrity, and principle, these are the unsung heroes of everyday life in America.

AVERAGE JOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Being an average Joe is awesome, and I’m proud to call myself one. Too often, though, we average Joes feel ashamed of who we are. For some reason we don’t seem to quite measure up. Why is that? What lies are we hearing and believing about our place in the world?

Many in contemporary society want to tell us our average Joe life is irrelevant, maybe even inconsequential. *What? Are you kidding me?* Tell that to the son who thinks his dad is the greatest. Tell that to the wife who has such deep respect and love for a husband who, day in and day out, goes to work at an unglamorous, demanding job to ensure his family is fed and sheltered. In fact, tell that to a savior named Jesus who chose twelve average Joes to help Him change the world.

Who cares if a man ever rafts the Colorado River, plays college football, or makes a million dollars before he’s forty? That guy may never leave that cubicle he calls home forty-plus hours a week. He may always drive a minivan, sell appliances, and live in a suburban tract house. Is he any less a man?

No way.

Labeled “average,” this Joe is that steadfast example of simple faith, honor, integrity, and character. He is the man who goes home at night to his wife and children. He mows the lawn, fixes the deck, reads to his kids, loves his wife, helps his friends, and serves his Lord. He’s the kind of neighbor who will lend you his tools and watch your house when you’re out of town. You trust him with your kids. He pays his bills and taxes. If he says he will be somewhere, he will be there—and on time. He’s got his problems, and he owns them. Quite simply, average Joe is the very best of who we are.

This book is a challenge to look deep within yourself, to better understand the man God has made you to be, to find contentment in the life God has blessed you with. I will urge you to finally let go of boyish or unrealistic dreams and replace them with the wise passions, wisdom, and discipline of a man. It’s time to make sure that integrity, honor, and moral steadfastness describe who you are.

Later in this book I will share some stories of average Joes that none of us will ever see on the front page or hear about on a cable news show. But in the world that really matters—God’s kingdom—they are heroes of the faith, true examples of *how God uses ordinary men to change the world*.

Before we go on, I want to make something really clear: when I use the word *average*, I don’t mean lazy, sloppy, inept, mediocre, or anything like that. A true average Joe works hard, give his all, makes a difference. And he does it without whining or feeling sorry for himself. An average Joe isn’t expecting to get rich or famous. He’s content knowing that the One whose opinion really counts is pleased with him.

While the world around us implies that we are nothing without fame, fortune, and recognition, we daily and without fanfare answer the call to perform the routine. As average Joes, we make a difference. The life we are living *does* have purpose, meaning, and honor.



Section One

WHEN WE WERE YOUNG



The Island

THE PLANE! THE PLANE!

In the late 1970s, millions of Americans gathered around their television set every Saturday night to watch a hit show on ABC. Tattoo, Mr. Roarke's faithful sidekick and assistant, would run up the circular stairs to ring the bell announcing the arrival of guests who'd paid fifty thousand dollars each to live out their dreams on a remote atoll in the Pacific called Fantasy Island. The stately Ricardo Montalban would gracefully greet each week's guests as they stepped out of the Grumman Widgeon seaplane onto the docks of their respective awaiting adventure. What would the plot be this week? Who would die? Who would survive? Who would live out their dreams in this perfect Eden? Who would not?

I still recall those late Saturday nights as a kid. My younger brother, Toby, and I would sprawl out with our pillows on the living room floor, popcorn in hand, to vicariously live the dreams of someone else through that innocuous television program. Every Saturday night our aspirations were played out on our antiquated television set in what someone had creatively described as "living color." For an hour we became professional football players, explorers, secret agents, and successful businessmen. While the characters in the show left

the island with dreams sometimes fulfilled, sometimes not, we boys believed that our lives would play out just as we dreamed.

The enigmatic visions I saw in my sleep as a boy still retain their color, passion, and vividness forty years later. I can still recall many slumber adventures where I soared through cloudless skies in an F-4 Phantom. In those safe hours of rest, I was an Air Force pilot with stick in hand, rocketing through endless blue, experiencing the freedom and awesome responsibility of commanding the aircraft at my fingertips. There were no boundaries, no what-ifs, only the infinite passions of a young boy.

As happens with boys, the dream would instantly change course to some far-off galaxy of exploration. In my mind's eye I would see the men who traveled into space aboard the early Apollo missions. In explosions of light and fire, each Saturn rocket strained to escape the bonds of earth and reach into the cold, dark expanse of space. Would I, too, be one of them? Would I wear the patch of a mission commander on my shoulder?

The visions of young boys are as complex and changing as the tides. From pilot to deep-sea diver, fireman to explorer, astronaut to cowboy. Each night's sleep can bring a new frontier to explore.

Such were the hopes and passions of young boys growing up in the sixties and seventies. There were no limits. We lived in a world full of possibility, potential, and marvel. I wonder, did you dream that way? Are you, like me, an average Joe who lay awake at night hoping that one day he would accomplish the impossible, some improbable feat that Walter Cronkite would report on the *CBS Evening News*?

It doesn't matter what decades we grew up in, didn't we all have aspirations of a life filled with adventure and promise? Didn't we grow up optimistic that we would someday be president, a doctor, an explorer, or a professional athlete? Just like on *Fantasy Island*, we knew we would get off the plane, leave behind our boyish years, and

step onto the deck of manhood ready to embrace the perfect adventure of our dreams.

THE RACE TO MANHOOD

For some of us the journey to manhood began in the military. Others began their quest with marriage and children. My dream was to attend college—something my parents wanted for me too. But since they were hard-working folks trying to raise two sons and a daughter on blue-collar wages, any grand vision of a college degree meant I would have to pay for it myself.

After my June graduation from Enterprise High School in Redding, California, I worked tirelessly the entire summer to save money for college. Three months later, after seemingly round-the-clock work, I had just enough cash for the first two semesters.

I can still remember the day I left home, college bound. For years I had waited for this moment. With dreams piled as high as the junk in the backseat of my 1967 VW bug, I hugged my mom, shook my dad's hand, punched brother Toby in the arm, fired up the pathetic 60-hp motor of my V-dub, and roared away. The early morning sun was just cresting the tops of the old oak trees on the east side of our small acreage. With a cloud of dust roiling behind me, I made my way down our dirt drive and onto the small gravel country road in front of our place. My throat tightened as I was hit with the full understanding of the journey ahead: I was exchanging simple and safe childish dreams for new and uncertain realities. As I turned onto Interstate 5, with San Diego and Point Loma College a thirteen-hour drive away, I was confident that the next time I drove up that dusty dirt road to my childhood home, I would be on my way to becoming somebody.

My race from boyhood to manhood was on.

And I felt the energy, maybe something like a greyhound racing dog exploding from the gate at the sound of the bell. From a

standstill, these incredible animal athletes accelerate to amazing speeds in a matter of seconds. Trained from birth and built for speed, the sleek, wiry greyhound is the fastest dog on the planet, reaching speeds of over forty miles per hour.

Circling an oval track, the greyhound charges hard after its quarry: a speeding mechanical hare. For its entire racing career, which may last for years, the greyhound focuses entirely on that furry prize. This dog will stress, strain, train, and sometimes risk life-altering injury in its single-minded quest to catch the ever-elusive, always-out-of-reach dummy hare. Nothing else seems to matter to the dog, just the prize.

While I am not a fan of this murky, sometimes troubling sport, I have seen videos of races run in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. It is intriguing to watch the intense, extreme, never-compromising focus the greyhound has as it chases its target. As if its life depends on catching the fleeting quarry, the greyhound runs with complete abandonment. However, if the greyhound ever catches the fake hare, the game is over. The dog is ruined once it knows the prize is worthless. The only good option is for the dog to be retired, never to run again.

Although no metaphor is perfect, I see many similarities between greyhounds and countless men. As young boys we imagined what life would be like when we left the nest. We spent many a night lying awake, dreaming of the future we would embrace. For scores of us, those impressionable years were the staging ground for what was to come. We scrapped and fought for each opportunity to prepare for the race that would begin when we left home.

During the eons that preceded me and for as long as there's time, young men will leave the safety of what they knew as children and strike out on their own in hopes of making the grade, of being someone, of accomplishing the visions that invaded their sleep. We all burst from the gate with the intention of changing the world

around us. Not unlike the greyhound leaping forward from its restraints, we see the prize before us: fame, fortune, happiness, and certain success waiting just around the corner.

WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR DREAMS?

I left for college in 1978. Now that there are probably fewer years ahead than there are behind me, I reflect on the race I have run. In looking back to those incredible early days, I realize there was nothing average about the dreams and plans I had for myself. Do you feel the same? As you were crossing the threshold from boy to man, did you dream of faraway places, powerful accomplishments, life-changing events, of living a life that far exceeded “the average”? Like the greyhound, did you race off from boyhood and run hard to catch the prize? As the perceived shackles of youth fell away, did you, like me, burst forward in hopes of doing the exceptional?

As I consider my life, I left the gate just like the guy next to me. I worked hard, trained, planned, dreamed. Yet for some reason my life—and your life—turned out different from what we anticipated. We’ve given it all we have, only to seemingly fall short.

Why is it that some men seemingly achieve everything and the rest of us do not? Did we lose the race? Or is there more to the story?

Each episode of *Fantasy Island* ended with the visitors going back home to the life they’d left behind. With memories packed away like the clothing in their luggage, they made their way to the dock. Some left with dreams fulfilled; some did not. Sounds like real life, doesn’t it?

Some of us have lived the dreams and fantasies we envisioned as boys. We have reached the pinnacle of success, climbed mountains, soared to the heavens—all the while laughing as each dream was fulfilled. Most of us have not. *We are the ones on the dock in Fantasy Island at the end of the show, standing with luggage in hand, wondering what the heck happened to our dream...to our life.*

All four gospels of the New Testament record the denial of Jesus by Peter. For months Peter had traveled with the Messiah. He had eaten, walked, talked, laughed, and cried with the King of kings. Peter was now a disciple of the Messiah. Prior to meeting Jesus, Peter had been a fisherman. Day after day his life had centered on the mundane, dirty, smelly job of fishing. Outside of his family and friends, no one knew or cared what Peter did. He was just another fisherman making a living on the Sea of Galilee.

But now Peter had become something more than a fisherman; he was somebody—a disciple of Jesus, a chosen one. What were his dreams? In his sleep did he see himself one day sitting at the right hand of Jesus in a glorious kingdom? Was he a bigwig in the court of the King? I know that if I had been in Peter's shoes, I would have had visions of grandeur. Given the opportunity to hang out with the King, I would have become arrogant, prideful, and self-centered.

And then, in an instant, Peter's life went from that perfect picture of the dream to a pile of broken glass: he denied the King of kings. *What now, Peter? Back to the boat and an anonymous life with the fishnets?*

With the crowing of the rooster, Peter's dreams were seemingly lost. Even though Jesus looked at Peter with eyes filled with love, the man Jesus had called "the rock" could only weep bitterly as his dreams died.

As you contemplate these words, do you understand Peter's tears? As you recall the dreams of boyhood, the passions of youth, even the hopes of innocence, do you see failure rearing its hideous head?

Have your boyhood dreams shattered like broken glass at your feet? Did you once think you would be somebody that you're not, only to end up average? Just another average Joe?

How in the world did this happen?