



WOW: Word Of the Week

NORMAL

September 6, 2023

What is “normal?” What is “your normal?” What do you consider usual? What does your life usually look like? Asked another way, What are the standards by which you live your life? What is the norm, the expectation? What happens daily? Weekly? Always? What are your values? What gives your life meaning? What is your #1, your lifelong pursuit? What priorities govern the use of your resources?

Is there a Christian normal? Since I was recently in Latin America, more specific questions come to my mind. What are our expectations when it comes to a standard of living? Our disposable income? Possessions? Our use of time? Vacations? Leisure?

Many of you know that for more than fifteen years, I have traveled to Latin America frequently. (The pandemic only inserted a brief parenthesis.) I think often about my brothers and sisters in Latin America. I have lived in their homes, eaten at their tables, accompanied them to daily and nightly Bible studies. I have been recipient of their generosity—sharing much from the little they had. They humble me. They cause me to question my “must have” list, any bucket list I may be tempted to develop. I marvel at their commitment—their outreach, their sacrifice. They present a stark challenge to our tendency to splurging, getaways, and vacation expectations.

Sometimes people ask me about things that have impressed me most in mission work. Here is something near the top of my life: although I go to help, more often than not I am the one being helped most. I go to serve but am served. Latin American Christians model commitment and sacrifice. They show me the smallness of my faith, my lack of imagination and dreams, my resistance to fully commit all that I am and have to Christ. The standard of discipleship that they consider normal humbles me. I watch them invest resources in the advance of the gospel in the midst of what we would call poverty.

In the midst of my appreciation for and admiration of their spirit of service and sacrifice, I am reminded of the wealth and luxury that we take for granted in the United States, what Donald Miller describes our “bubble of affluence and convenience.” Our normal! We take for granted our houses, our bigger houses, our vacations, our enjoyable experiences, our leisure, our luxuries. Many of us seldom experience genuine sacrifice—giving up something for others. I am reminded of an elder with whom I served and the commitment that he and his wife had made: we will give more to the advance of the Lord’s work than we keep for themselves. Who in their right mind would consider giving 50%+ to the Lord?

Too often we are so ensnared by cultural expectations of success and consumerism so that we would scarcely consider making a genuine sacrifice, giving up something important to us, for the advance of the gospel.

What is your normal? What is the standard of our life? Is it the “Christ-standard?” Do we need to reconsider what is of greatest value? A brief look back to two previous WOW thoughts -- are we seeking first the pearl and treasure for which we would gladly give all that we have, is the rescue mission faltering because the real treasure has thus far escaped us? Yes, I know. Lots of questions! I need questions. They help me evaluate self. Perhaps others will want to rethink what the Bible says about cost-counting and cross-bearing. Jesus said that those would be normal for his followers!