

A Surprising Lesson Doc Holiday Can Teach You About Your Trials

Near the end of the movie *Tombstone*, Wyatt Earp tells his friend Doc Holiday that he just wants a “normal life.” Holiday’s response is classic.

“There’s no such thing as normal life. There’s just life.”

I have come to believe, that as unlikely as it seems for wisdom to come from such a source, Doc Holiday may have been right. What I think people mostly mean by “normal life” is actually calm, even, unchallenged life with neither great victories nor disappointing defeats. The seductive charm of such normality, so called, is evenness. Such dreamt-of unthreatening continuity, despite its plasticity, has few hurts or frights or failures. It also wants challenge, opportunity and the delight of victory.

Beyond that, such “normal life” simply doesn’t exist. Anywhere. At least not for long. Disruptions, explosions, setbacks and celebrations are life. The family that mistakenly believes there is some way to play it safe, some private sanctuary where they can insulate themselves, has failed to take into account cancer, global financial collapse, war, the sins of others and the entire human catalog of slings and arrows. That is life. Real life. They also fail to take into account all the good things that, even though they are good, totally destroy normal life. Babies for example. Babies have no respect whatsoever for normalcy. In fact, as wonderful as they are, they seem intent on destroying normal life and its benefits, such as sleep.

Life is just life. Shall then Doc Holiday be numbered among the prophets? He was right in so far as it went, but that

simply begs more questions and opens more cans. The determination to create and cling to normal life will result in frustration and even bitterness because it cannot be done. Those disruptions, even good ones, will become hardly more than obstacles to normal life. That can actually cause parents to resent the disruption of their baby. The next step is predictable, of course. Seeing that a baby would certainly disrupt the prosperous, fun, easy life they now call "normal," they disallow the baby, abort it, in other words, because it threatens their normal life. Hence, the idolatrous pursuit of the myth of normal life actually allows the horrific to become normal.

What is the antidote? Beyond Doc Holiday's pronouncement, what makes life, just life, as he put it, meaningful? What dignifies and explains and even sanctifies the whole loud, messy, boisterous, beautiful thing?

A single verse of Scripture rises above all others to speak to that very question. The verse that my friend, Steve Berger, says is the hardest verse in the whole Bible is the very one that makes sense of real life.

"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28). It is the most expansive, all-embracing statement of life in all of philosophy or religion. It makes life make sense.

All things... All. Not some. Not just the normal stuff. All. Maybe it is the hardest verse because it is so huge. All things. The entire universe cannot swallow all things. For those who love God, life in all its craziness, in all its topsy-turvy iterations, is not normal. Everybody has relatives. No, in fact, it's hardly ever normal. But it is good. And we can see it through fearlessly, live it boldly, even when we limp through its darkest moments because we love God and we can trust Him, not to keep it all normal, but in ways beyond our immediate comprehension to make it all work

together for good. His call. His purpose. His love. His promise.

In life, not in normal life but in real life, hard things can happen. Crazy hard things that can be crushing. But as hard to receive as it is, it makes life worth it. That one wonderful verse means I don't have to clutch hopelessly at normal only to see it burst like a bubble over and over again. I don't need normal. I will not worship it or grieve for it when it is shattered. Why would I want normal when I can have good, God's good? {eoa}

Dr. Mark Rutland is president of both *Global Servants* () and the *National Institute of Christian Leadership* (). A renowned communicator and New York Times best-selling author, he has more than 30 years of experience in organizational leadership, having served as a senior pastor and a university president.