

every
little
thing

Making a World of Difference
Right Where You Are

deidra riggs



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To Nano and Popo

You loved me, right from the start.



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Foreword

Marjorie Knight told me when I wasn't quite yet nine.

She turned to me while we were hulling a heap of strawberries over her sink. Her white hair caught all this afternoon light. And her gravelly voice rolled over those words like smoothed stones:

“Running hard after an extraordinary life turns out to be chasing a lie. The realest extraordinary is always found in the ordinary. That extra everyone’s looking for? It’s found in ordinary.”

She didn't say much after that, but I tasted her words in the strawberries she gave me, in the swallowing down of the rubies, the glory of them running out the side of the mouth.

I'm half the age of Marjorie before I deeply understand how sunlight can warm anyone's face when you take time to smile and give them an ear. That anyone can make a difference for all eternity—if they believe that it all counts, that it all matters—that it all, everything, can be the beginning of a widening, expansive miracle.

True, you won't read it as a headline in *People* magazine. But it is what the heroic people know: that glossy red carpets can lead to nowhere, and that the ordinary is the everyday container that holds *the realest extraordinary*.

That everyone single one of us gets eyes to look into, and people to touch, and light to give, and hands to reach out to, and igniting change to our own sacred corners of a waiting, broken world—and it's precisely because we feel small that we can walk through the world's broken cracks and get to the heart of people and make a difference.

The ordinary becomes the extraordinary when the eyes see the extra glory here. The ordinary becomes the extraordinary when our eyes see the extra glory of God right here where we are, moving and shaping and strengthening and rebuilding and redeeming and changing and resurrecting—and when our feet step into what God's doing right where we are.

There's nothing in this world that's normal—there's only growing blind to the glory.

It's a ridiculously free world. Everyone gets to accept the invitation of extraordinary into their ordinary or not.

Deidra Riggs is one astonishing woman whose life bears witness to just this. I've leaned across a table and listened to the winsome wisdom of this woman turn a key and unlock a door to more—*unlock something in me*.

Deidra listens not quite like anyone else I've ever met. She listens to hearts—to wandering, wondering, wounded ones—and then intimately to the heart of God. And because Deidra lets herself become all ear, she is a rare, wise soul, uniquely positioned to voice what our souls are most hungry for and usher us directly into a veritable fresh and satisfying feast, the glory of it running down the sides of our questions and fears.

Foreword

Deidra said it once to me and I've never forgotten it: "We get to be terrified, so God gets to be glorified."

We get to jump tandem with God into the unknown, we get to break free of our comfort zones, we get to be the lucky ones who live large right where we are—we *get to be terrified*—so *God gets glorified*.

We get to look squarely at our lives and realize: We don't need more things. We need more *meaning* in everything.

And that meaning in our lives that we yearn for, it unfolds in our ordinary, when we get up every day with just a refrain of three lines:

The Extraordinary is *here*.

Because *God. is. here*.

So how can I say yes to the Extraordinary he's doing *right here*?

Because the gospel needs us to do more than only believe in it—it *asks us to be living it*.

Because you doing the next thing is The Next Big Thing that has a literal domino-effect, forever-effect in the kingdom of God.

Because how you courageously live your every days can make a world of people *taste* and *see* that the Lord, that life, that this world of making a difference, is good.

This is no small thing.

This is an *extraordinary* thing.

This can be your ordinary thing.

Just by the way you do *every little thing*.

Ann Voskamp, www.aholyexperience.com
and author of the *New York Times* bestsellers
One Thousand Gifts and *The Greatest Gift*
The Farm, Canada, Spring 2015

Part 1



*Knowing
Yourself*

Introduction

I had always dreamed of jumping out of an airplane. So when I finally got the chance, I didn't have one ounce of fear.

It was a beautiful fall morning in Pennsylvania, and I woke up early to make the ninety-minute drive to New Jersey where I was to attend "jump school." Only my husband knew about my adventure. There was, I reasoned, no need to cause anyone concern. I'd be home safe and sound before most people had eaten their breakfast and finished their Saturday morning chores.

On that Saturday morning, I pointed my car east and drove toward the culmination of a dream I'd been nursing for a very long while. I don't know where or what or who first got me started dreaming about jumping from an airplane with a parachute strapped to my back. I really have no reason to want to do something like that. I mean, I do like adventure, but I don't like roller coasters. No one in my family—not my parents or my sister—rides roller coasters. The idea of riding the rails at a local theme park is enough to turn my knees to jelly. I guess I like a certain genre of adventure. Parasailing?

Check. Swimming with the dolphins? Check. Skydiving? Yes, please.

When I tell people I jumped out of an airplane, someone inevitably asks, “On purpose?” Ha! Of course it was on purpose.

Naturally, I wasn’t by myself. The jump I took was a tandem jump with a skilled and experienced skydiver. When I pulled into the parking lot of that jump school, I felt absolutely giddy with excitement. I parked the car and locked it, and I made my way to the office to check in and get my instructions.

There were about twelve of us jumping that morning. Double that when you include the professionals who would welcome us on their own thrill-seeking adventures, our tandem guides. We signed a lot of papers in the office, saying we wouldn’t blame anyone but ourselves if our adventure that day ended in anything but success. That was saying a lot, because failure at skydiving really isn’t an option. Then all of us were ushered into a tiny room where we stood behind a rail and watched a video about skydiving, the risks and the joys. We were then led out to the hangar, where we received our instructions. I was told that when the time came to jump out of the plane, I should spread my arms and legs wide and lift up my chin. That was about it. Our instruction session lasted about ten minutes and gave us just enough information to know this was probably a little bit risky but definitely a whole lot of fun.

After our jump school training, we were each given a harness, and an attendant helped make sure we were properly fitted and locked in. Then we were assigned a jump expert—an actual skydiver! I wish I could remember my guy’s name. He was the coolest. He had bright white hair and skin that was nearly translucent. His eyes were hidden behind reflective

sunglasses that wrapped around his spiked and gelled hair, and he wore a jumpsuit that was mostly white with a few touches of color added for flair. For our purposes, let's call him "my guy."

My guy handed me an altimeter. Everyone got one. We were told to wear the altimeter on our wrist like a watch. All around the face of the altimeter were numbers, and a dial in the center would serve the purpose of keeping track of just how far we fell from the sky once we jumped out of the plane. My guy tapped a red arrow on my altimeter and said, "When we reach this altitude, that's when I'll pull the rip cord."

I looked at the red arrow, and then I looked up at him, shaking my head. "Oh no," I said with a wave of my hand and hint of bravado (okay, probably more than a hint), "I'm going to pull the cord. I've been looking forward to this for so long!"

My guy tucked his chin in toward his shoulder, and I saw his eyebrows rise over the tops of his sunglasses. Was that a smile? I couldn't be sure. "Are you sure?" he asked.

"Definitely!" I said.

He didn't try to make me change my mind. He didn't try to convince me to reconsider. He simply said, "Okay." Then he stood behind me, as if we were already strapped together, and gave me rip cord pulling instructions, which went like this: "When we get to that arrow, reach down with your right hand and pull the cord. I'll see you up there!" And then he was gone, boosting my confidence that much further. If I had something to be concerned about, he'd have stuck around, either to convince me to change my mind or to make sure I knew what I was doing. Right?

The next time I saw my guy was when we were all headed to the airplane on the tarmac. It was a small propeller plane,

and he stood at the door and saluted me, then hopped into the plane ahead of me. On the plane, we sat on the floor, scooped up very closely to one another, single file. I sat right in front of my guy, and he hooked our harnesses together with heavy-duty carabiner hooks, and not long after that the plane took off.

We climbed in wide, loopy circles up into the clouds, and I watched the airstrip and the jump school and the autumn leaves in the trees get smaller and smaller through the little airplane window at my shoulder. I was still giddy. I don't know that I can say the same about the rest of the people on the plane. I wasn't really paying attention to them.

When the plane reached whatever altitude is the right altitude for jumping, one of the skydivers stood up and opened the door—something I'd never seen happen before on an airplane. The door was like an overhead garage door that rolled up into the top of the plane, and I caught a glimpse of the sky.

I would be the second to jump. Well, me and my guy. The first to jump was someone who'd done this before. He was performing his very first solo jump, along with his jump instructor. They stood at that wide-open door. They counted to three. Then they just fell away. But because the airplane was moving at the same time they fell away from us, from where I sat, it looked as if they simply disappeared. Gone. Into thin air.

My guy tapped me on my shoulder and said into my ear, "I want you to slide down there and sit on the edge and wrap your legs around the plane." That, right there, was the first time I thought to myself, "Hmmm. That's not something you hear every day." I followed his instructions and slid myself down to the edge and wrapped my legs around the plane. My guy said, "Remember to lift your chin," and the next thing I

Introduction

knew, we were falling through the sky. *Hurting* is probably a better word.

I could not catch my breath or close my lips around my teeth. The hood of my jacket flapped around like a bird trapped in a wood-burning stove. My throat closed up and threatened to suffocate me.

I was having a blast. Oh my goodness, what a rush!

When the parachute opened over our heads, there was nothing but silence. Well, silence and the sound of my ear-piercing screams. But once I calmed down, there was silence. Suspended in the air, I took in the beauty of it all. The sky above. The autumn colors below. The fact that I'd just jumped out of a plane. Even the rainbow-colored canopy was a gift in that moment—not just because it was keeping us from catastrophe but also because of its beauty. Finally, I found some words, and I thanked my guy for the jump and for this moment as I kept marveling at the beauty surrounding us both. He agreed. “It really is an incredible thing. Not very many people get to do something like this,” he said.

Our landing was perfect, and when my feet touched the earth, I could not have been more excited. My guy and I high-fived each other. We did the bump. We hugged. And do you know what he said to me? He said, “Deidra! You’re a skydiver now!”

Me. A skydiver.

Eventually, I made my way back to my car and began driving west, back toward home. It took a long time to recover from such an adrenaline rush, but I could feel that I was slowly coming back to myself as I drove the car down the road.

About forty-five minutes into the drive home, however, I had an epiphany. Is that the right word? Perhaps it would be

better to say that I arrived at a terrifying realization. It was a realization that brought me right back to reality and sent me veering off the road and onto the shoulder. I realized that I never pulled the rip cord!

Egads!

As I sat there on the side of the highway, my breath came in gasps and my chest heaved up and down with the horror of it all. I, with my arrogant bravado—waving my guy off and telling him I'd take care of pulling the rip cord—didn't pull the rip cord. Oh my goodness, I would have killed us both!

I began to cry. I considered turning the car around to apologize to my guy for almost ending his skydiving career for good. I was mortified. I was terribly embarrassed. I was so very thankful to be alive and to know that my guy was alive and well, probably jumping out of another plane at that very moment. "Good grief, God!" I cried out. "How in the world do you put up with me? Thank you, thank you, thank you," I told him, "for saving our lives today!"

Do you know what happened next? Right in that moment, on the side of the road, I realized that my guy was a lot like God. My guy was going to jump whether I went with him or not. He lived for days like these, when the breeze was still and the sky was clear. On this particular day, my guy had been kind enough to let me join him on his first jump of the day. And when I got all arrogant and proud (right in his face, to boot!), he took it all in stride. Because he knew the deal. He knew that if I flubbed it, he had everything under control.

We have video of that jump I took. In the video you can see when we reach the point in our jump where the hand of the altimeter rested on the red arrow. My guy pulls my arm in front of me and points to the altimeter, and I give him no

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response. Just my cheeks pressed up against my eyeballs and my lips pulled away from my teeth. Then my guy reaches around and taps me on my forehead. Nothing. So my guy points to the cameraman, gives a thumbs-up sign, reaches for the rip cord with his right hand, just as I was supposed to have done, and away we go as the canopy unfurls over our heads and sweeps us up into the sky.

After all of that, my guy never mentioned my mistake. He didn't point his finger at me once we reached the ground and say, "You almost killed us both! You never pulled the cord!" While we were suspended in the air, he never said, "What were you thinking?" And when our feet touched the ground, my guy gave me a high five, he bumped hips with me, and then, as the icing on the cake, my guy called me a skydiver.

Me. A skydiver. Now, you and I both know I am far from a skydiver. But like I said, my guy was a lot like God that day. God, who isn't afraid of adventure. God, who is going to do something incredible despite us. God, who invites us to join him on the journey and the adventure of a lifetime. He doesn't point his finger at us and count all the ways we mess up. Not even when we think we've got it all under control and we tell him so.

Sometimes our dreams are like that. They are big, and we approach them with bravado and tell God we'll take it from here. Thank God for grace. It covers us in situations such as these, like a brightly colored canopy unfurled over us before we realize just how badly we need it and how out of control we really are.

God's grace covers us in the little things as well. No life is so small that God doesn't notice it. No act of worship escapes his view. Who cares if we've got all the edges smoothed

out? Even when we miss the mark and we get too big for our britches, God is there. He has a plan for us, and he delights in us. God is perfectly capable of handling it all (and then some) on his own, but—and this just blows my mind—he chooses to invite us to join him, even before we know what we’re doing and before we’ve gotten our act together.

That, my friend, is the message of this book.

God has designs on us (see Gal. 1:15)—plans to use us—and in this case the proof of that is the book you now hold in your hands. I never thought or intended or dreamed that a single person in this world would buy a book I’d written. But saying that is a bit misleading—as if I’d actually even considered a scenario in which someone else would read my writing.

I hadn’t. As far as I was concerned, there are writers, and there are readers. That, my friends, is the circle of literary life as I understood it. We need each other, and I am more than happy to fulfill the role of the introverted and slightly nerdy bookworm, curled up on the corner of a well-loved couch cushion with a dog-eared book in my hand.

As it turns out, God knows us well.

He knows the way you’re wired. He knows the things that scare you. He’s not surprised by your rough edges. He doesn’t blink twice when you insert your foot in your mouth or miss an opportunity to point someone his way. He knows what you’ve already decided you aren’t.

How about that? Which jobs have you crossed off because you don’t have the time, the experience, or the resources? Which adventure is God trying to get on your calendar, but you keep deleting it because you’re not as smart as so-and-so, or because that adventure doesn’t fit inside your comfort zone, or because you’d just rather not, thank you very much?

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I don't think there's a person among us who doesn't want his or her life to make a difference. We see a need in our church, our school, our neighborhood, our family, the world. We look at it and think, *Someone really should get to work on that*. Then we wait for the next great someone to show up, take matters into her own hands, and change the situation—change the world. Because, really, who are we?

We are “just” the car pool lane sitters, the diaper changers, the dish washers, the cubicle workers, the second-job holders, the lawn mowers, the pancake flippers, the rule followers, the occasional Sunday morning churchgoers, the Saturday night Netflixers, the Facebook status updaters, the one-mile joggers, the regular everyday ordinary us.

We are not the world changers. That's a job for someone else. Someone with more moxie, more wisdom, more knowledge, more humor, more skill, more subscribers, a bigger platform, a better marriage, a fancier vehicle, a more gorgeous headshot, letters after her name, multiple speaking gigs, a perfect manicure, and an organic garden in her suburban backyard.

But isn't that what Gideon thought? When that angel looked at Gideon and pronounced him a mighty warrior (see Judg. 6), I imagine Gideon pointing his index finger to his heart and looking over his shoulder before looking back at that angel to mouth the words, “Who? Me?” God sees something in us that doesn't reflect in a mirror. It's the person God knows we can be when we surrender our lives to him. And that person? That person is a world changer.

Maybe you're the one who sees a need, and you might even see the solution. But somehow you're convinced you couldn't possibly be the person for *that* job. If you entertain

the dreams God placed on your heart and wonder how you'll ever find the time, the space, the audience, the resources to make that dream come true, this book was written for you. You are my soul sister.

Perhaps you're convinced your life is lackluster and insignificant. People ask what you do, and your response begins with "Just . . .," and you stifle a sigh when you're done speaking the words. You feel like a closet wallflower and a self-doubter, an expert comparer. You never measure up. You feel as if you cower in caves instead of toppling injustice, while constantly shushing the desire in your heart to see someone—*anyone*—make a difference in places no one else seems to notice. This book is for you too. I have carved my name into the walls of that very same cave.

God has a different message to share with us. The job God has given us isn't about *fixing* anything. It's about surrendering every part of me to all of him. Changing the world isn't the same as fixing it. The world has already been fixed; it has already been saved. And changing the world doesn't mean one woman, all by herself. Changing the world is about each individual member of the body of Christ recognizing the sacredness of the role we play in the places we find ourselves every day, even if our place is in the car pool lane instead of the marble halls of justice or the towering pulpit of a megachurch.

Most of us will make a difference in this world, but not because of some grand or large-scale initiative. No, most of us will change our corner of the world and make an impact that stands the test of time through the small and seemingly insignificant (to us) interactions and decisions and conversations of our average days. We make a difference where we live, and incrementally, that place begins to shift. But the

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first and most important shift takes place on the inside, in all those places that rise up within, making you point to your heart, look over your shoulder, and then mouth the words, “Who? Me?”

This book is your invitation to celebrate that journey. Celebrating the significance of this one, ordinary, average life shifts our perspective and starts us on the road to God’s adventure for our lifetime. This book invites you to the celebration of every little thing that makes your life spectacularly breathtaking and of the fulfillment of all God has in store. It’s a book that climbs down from the high and lofty and that quietly shuts a door against the clamoring and clanging and striving and trying to be heard above the noise. It’s not a book written because I’ve figured out all the answers to all the questions. It’s not a list of items you can check off and know you’ve changed the world. This book is my story of a heart turned inside out, a faith that lost its footing and scrambled up for one last gasp of air. It is the story of finding myself at the bottom of a drought-stricken gully, praying for someone to make it rain, and discovering a swollen drop of water at the bottom of a dusty Styrofoam cup. A cup, I realized, I’d been holding in my hand all along.

This book is the story of how God is in control of our lives, even when we think we’ve got things under control. It is also your encouragement that when God looks at you and you wonder if he really sees someone who can make a difference in this world, he looks you straight in the eyes and says, “Yes. You.”

Keep your chin up. It’s time to jump.