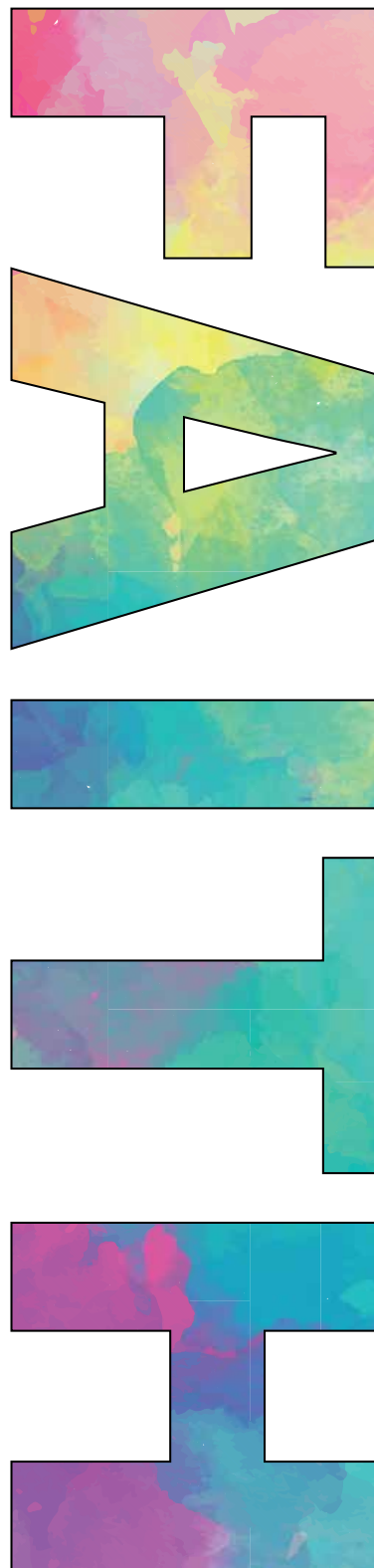


Vibrant Faith

Finding the Extraordinary
in the
Ordinary

a ten week journey with scripture

by: Katie Kibbe



Kibbe / VIBRANT FAITH-- FINDING THE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY /

Dear Friend-

Welcome. I wish that you were here with me so that we could have this conversation in person. I want to hear how you are doing, where you have seen great success lately, and where you might be struggling. I want to hear about the pain that is tugging quietly in the corner of your heart and listen as you tell me about the hope that is taking wing in your life as well. I want to hear about what is bringing you joy! Most of all I want to hold your hands and pray with you. Depending upon the time of day, we can have something cool (or warm) to drink and laugh, the kind of laughter that brings tears to your eyes and makes you feel as though you have had a really good core workout.

Since our “in person” conversation can’t happen, I have written this guidebook. It is my prayer that you will meet with a group of women and work through these pages together. There is something so powerful that happens when women find friendship in Christ. As finding a group is not always possible, don’t let that stop you— you can partner with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to accompany you on the journey through the pages.

For so many years, I was just going through the motions in my spiritual life. I was busy and was not truly aware that a deeper and more vibrant faith was possible for a big city girl like me. If I stopped long enough to notice that things might be a little off kilter in my soul, I quickly got back to being busy again so that I would not have to notice the gentle tugging in my soul that was quietly calling me to go deeper in my faith. After taking a few stabs at bible study (quit, too boring) and trying to organize a faith sharing group of women (they quit, they were too busy).... I coasted along. I saw others who had a more vibrant faith life, but I did not know how to move from point A to point B. It became easy for me to excuse myself and say that a more vibrant faith was for other people. But, in the quiet of Mass on Sunday, I would ask— “is it possible that there is something more?”

In coasting through life, I settled for mediocrity and experienced a boredom in my spirit. I was able to keep all the parts of my life safely in their own boxes and maintain “control” over my life. Each part of me had its own safe little spot- but none of it was integrated. My faith did not inform my decisions and I was unable to recognize where God was working in my daily life. I was unable to find the

extraordinary in the ordinary. It was easy to find joy in the big events, but the day to day was living was a bit of a chore.

The Catholic Church has a beautiful tradition of marking seasons with a title to call our attention to the spiritual significance of the passing of time. You will recognize the season of Advent as a time of preparation for the birth of Christ and Lent as a season of preparation for the Resurrection of Jesus. We highlight the big events on our calendars, but the majority of our time is comprised of Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time is the time in between the “big stuff”; the time where life really happens. How is your ordinary time?

Over the past several years, in conversation with many women, prayer, participating in the Mass and the Sacraments, and reading Scripture— my faith in God has grown deeper and more vibrant. I discovered that God *is* in the ordinary parts of my day. He is always present and He is always Extra-ordinary. In finding God in the ordinary— I have found more peace, more joy, and a deeper connection to those around me. I pray that this guidebook will help you to find the Extraordinary in your own ordinary.

However you use this guidebook, whether it is alone with your bible and a cup of coffee or tea; whether it is in conversation with a friend (old or new)— don’t be afraid to start. No growth or learning ever takes place without effort and time given on our part. The Holy Spirit longs to bring new life to the dry parts of your life, He wants to reveal Himself to you in new and exciting ways, He wants to lead you to a deeper and more fulfilling relationship with God, and He wants you to discover the work that you alone were created to do.

As we meet the Holy Spirit in Scripture, you will find it easier to call upon the Him and allow Him to make you more aware of His loving presence. It is my prayer that as you read Scripture and ponder what the Holy Spirit reveals to you about Jesus, you will grow more deeply in love with God and all the people He has placed in your life. I pray that you will experience the peace of Christ in your ordinary. Join me as we discover a more Vibrant Faith and find the Extraordinary in the Ordinary.

May the Peace of Christ settle deep in your soul and remain with you,

Kibbe / VIBRANT FAITH-- FINDING THE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY /

Katie Kibbe

June 29, 2017

Feast of Saints Peter and Paul

—Week One—
The Guide for Your Journey

*I will lead the blind on a way they do not know;
by paths they do not know I will guide them.
I will turn darkness into light before them,
and make crooked ways straight.
These are my promises: I made them, I will not forsake them.
Isaiah 42:16*

*I am the Lord, your God,
who grasp your right hand;
It is I who say to you,
“Fear not, I will help you.”
Isaiah 41:13*

Introduction

When I was just a bit younger and a little more naive, I gave in to the temptation to become just like the rest of my family. In some families, conforming means driving the same car. For some it might be wearing the same style of clothes. Yet, for others it may mean attending the same school. In my family, conforming meant running.

When my mother was in her 30's she ran the Houston Marathon. Both of my brothers followed suit in their 30's as well. I waited until I was just on the very last edge of my 30's before I joined them in their crazy obsession. Just before I turned 40, I was able to run the Marine Corp Marathon in Washington, D.C.

Running long distances, while not expensive, requires a lot of attention and planning before you ever make it out the door. You need good shoes with lots of support, clothing that does not rub in awkward places, food stashed along the route, and plenty of water. If you have young children, you also need a supportive cast of family and friends to entertain them while you are out pounding the

pavement. It is also very helpful to have a community to run with for company and support as well.

The conditions outside will affect each run differently. It is easy to prepare yourself for the temperature but, the wind is another matter altogether. Whether you are running 100 feet or 26.2 miles, the wind impacts your speed. If you are facing the wind, you will run more slowly and will feel as though each step requires more effort. The resistance you face requires that you exert more energy. On the other hand, if the wind is at your back, not as much effort is required of and you may even be able to pick up your pace a little bit, buoyed along by the wind, and potentially set a PR (personal record).

I have often heard it said that the spiritual life is more like a marathon than a sprint. There is not as much preparation or time involved in a sprint as a marathon requires. You need to train for both events, but the time commitment involved in the marathon is much greater than the 100 meter dash. As much as we would like for our journey back to God to be fast, flat, and straight (like a sprint), not requiring us to exert much energy or planning, this is not the reality. We find, more often than not, that our lives follow a path that takes time to travel, is populated with both obstacles and beautiful views, and has many turns that shield what is just around the bend, similar to a marathon.

The time and attention that we give to any endeavor will help determine whether we will reach our goal. If our goal is to someday see the face of God, we need to make an effort on this side of heaven to make sure that we will recognize Him when the time comes. As time and attention are necessary in order to cross the finish line of a marathon, we need to take seriously the preparation necessary for our spiritual or faith journey.

We need to allow the Holy Spirit to be the wind at our back to push us forward on our journey.

In *Vibrant Faith*, we will discover that the Holy Spirit wants to be our guide and aid in our faith journey. We will see that He wants to be the wind at our back that makes our trip less of an uphill battle and more of a stroll with a sweet friend in a

beautiful meadow. We will find that, in partnering with the Holy Spirit, we need only exert a bit of energy each day for an enormous pay off in the long run.

Where are you in your faith journey? If you were to compare your journey with a race, would you still be in the planning phases where you are dreaming about one day starting to train? You might enjoy talking about “one day” being like those other women who just seem to know how to “pray so beautifully” out loud.

Are you still trying to get organized and hope that the next best selling book will help get you motivated to commit to your training plan so that you can venture out tomorrow, next week, or next month? You are going to Mass most weeks, but aren’t able to commit to anything else. You keep thinking... tomorrow I will start. Tomorrow, I will set aside time to pray. You are able to sign up for bible study, but doing all of the ‘homework’ is a stretch.

Maybe you have your training plan, but are not able to stick with it. Do you feel as though you are still in bed hitting the snooze button thinking you can put off your short run yet again? Have you started to train (maybe you are involved in a weekly bible study and making it to Mass regularly), but you are still looking for excuses not to follow through with the plan?

Are you on the training course, running into the wind, trying to figure out why it all seems so hard? Have you laced up your shoes, but are not quite sure that you have what it takes to go the distance? You feel as though you are running uphill more often than down? You are committed to the journey, but maybe you are looking for a community to help you sustain the pace.

Or, do you feel as though you have hit a great pace and are considering trying to kick it up a notch? You have a committed prayer life, regular Mass attendance, a community of spiritual support, and structure to your spiritual life. You feel as though you are called to do more, but are not quite sure what the “More” is.

Wherever you are: still in the planning stages or well on your way— it does not matter. The Holy Spirit wants to make the journey more pleasant, sweeter, and richer. We spend most of our time performing the mundane tasks of life. This is the

training ground that God is using to strengthen our faith. Finding the Extraordinary in the Ordinary will remind you of His presence, His mercy, and His love. Our study, *Vibrant Faith*, will help you recognize the Holy Spirit's action in your life and encourage you to take the next step in your spiritual journey. Take to heart the beautiful words of Isaiah that you read just a few minutes ago.

*I will lead the blind on a way they do not know;
by paths they do not know I will guide them.
I will turn darkness into light before them,
and make crooked ways straight.
These are my promises: I made them, I will not forsake them.
Isaiah 42:16*

*I am the Lord, your God,
who grasp your right hand;
It is I who say to you,
"Fear not, I will help you."
Isaiah 41:13*

The Holy Spirit wants to lead you and guide you. Fear not! God's Holy Spirit is with you as you take the next step. Together, let's open our hearts and minds to the possibility of experiencing a *Vibrant Faith* in God. A faith that (as Jesus promised) despite being the size of a mustard seed will move mountains. A faith that will allow us to see how extra-ordinary life really is, even on the most ordinary of days.

Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church

At the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis issued an encyclical entitled: *Light of Faith (Lumen Fidei)*, in Latin). Begun by Pope Benedict, the collaborative encyclical encourages all Christians to remain true to their call from God and continue to seek to hear the voice of God over the voices of the world.

"Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see; we realize that it contains a great promise of fulfillment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us. Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey

through time. On the one hand, it is a light coming from the past, the light of the foundational memory of the life of Jesus which revealed his perfectly trustworthy love, a love capable of triumphing over death. Yet since Christ has risen and draws us beyond death, faith is also a light coming from the future and opening before us vast horizons which guide us beyond our isolated selves towards the breadth of communion." *Lumen Fidei* paragraph 4

"... Faith transforms the whole person precisely to the extent that he or she becomes open to love. Through this blending of faith and love we come to see the kind of knowledge which faith entails, its power to convince and its ability to illumine our steps. Faith knows because it is tied to love, because love itself brings enlightenment. *Faith's understanding is born when we receive the immense love of God which transforms us inwardly and enables us to see reality with new eyes.*" *Lumen Fidei* paragraph 26 (emphasis added)

"...The light of faith in Jesus also illumines the path of all those who seek God, and makes a specifically Christian contribution to dialogue with the followers of the different religions. The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the witness of those just ones who, before the covenant with Abraham, already sought God in faith. ...We can see from this that the path of religious man passes through the acknowledgment of a God who cares for us and is not impossible to find." *Lumen Fidei* paragraph 35

"Because faith is born of an encounter which takes place in history and lights up our journey through time, it must be passed on in every age. It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus. But how is this possible? How can we be certain, after all these centuries, that we have encountered the "real Jesus"? Were we merely isolated individuals, were our starting point simply our own individual ego seeking in itself the basis of absolutely sure knowledge, a certainty of this sort would be impossible. I cannot possibly verify for myself something which happened so long ago. But this is not the only way we attain knowledge. Persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others. Even our own knowledge and self-awareness are relational; they are linked to others who have gone before us: in the first place, our parents, who gave us our life and our name. Language itself, the words by which we make sense of our lives and the world around us, comes to us from others, preserved in the living memory of others. Self-knowledge is only possible when we share in a greater memory. The same thing holds true for faith, which brings human understanding to its fullness. Faith's past, that act of Jesus' love which brought new life to the world, comes down to us through the memory of others — witnesses — and is kept alive in that one remembering subject

which is the Church. The Church is a Mother who teaches us to speak the language of faith. Saint John brings this out in his Gospel by closely uniting faith and memory and associating both with the working of the Holy Spirit, who, as Jesus says, "will remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). The love which is the Holy Spirit and which dwells in the Church unites every age and makes us contemporaries of Jesus, thus guiding us along our pilgrimage of faith." *Lumen Fidei* paragraph 38. Pope Francis. "*Lumen Fidei*-Encyclical Letter, Francis." Vatican: the Holy See. Vatican Website. Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2013. Web 29 May 2017.

Scripture

*No longer will I hide my face from them,
for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel,
says the Lord God.
Ezekiel 39:29*

*No-one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God.
1 Corinthians 2:11*

Read Hebrews 11

Hebrews was written for a Jewish-Christian audience who were very familiar with the Old Testament stories. Chapter 11 gives us a beautiful picture of the importance of faith and the lived example of faith from our "fathers in faith" in the Old Testament.

1. What is faith? (See verses 1-3)
2. What allows us to understand that God created and orders our world?

3. Why is it impossible to please God without faith? Explain what verse 5 means to you.

4. List the names of people you are familiar with who are featured in this passage.

5. Each of the people listed had faith in God and His promises. Name at least three things (identified in this passage) that faith strengthened someone to do.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

6. In light of what we read in Hebrews 11, who populates “so great a cloud of witnesses” that Paul mentions in Hebrews 12:1?

7. This cloud of witnesses is composed of more than the Old Testament heroes, who else do you think is in this “cloud”?

8. Paul associates the spiritual journey with a race, what similarities do you see between the faith journey and a race or training for a race?

Discussion

We have been reminded so many times of the words of Jesus: *“I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* (Matthew 17:20)

There are more days than not that this advice is difficult for me to hear. It is hard to focus during prayer, my mind wanders to all of the things that are going wrong in the world (and, sometimes, my life), I have difficult emotions to deal with, and on

and on the list goes. We know that Jesus would not have said these words if they were not true. But, so often, we shift this saying into the column of: “advice for those who have it all together” or “advice for the holy ones”. It is easy to dismiss this verse and stop paying attention altogether.

I also experience days when the faith journey is smooth and my burdens are light. Prayer comes easily and there is much peace and a true sense of God’s presence. On these days, when the wind is at my back, I can easily feel as though God will move mountains at my request. But these days are few and far between.

On the days when we are struggling to find peace... we need to hold on to the hope that Jesus promises that our faith can move mountains. On the days when we are resting in His love and it all seems to make sense, we need to savor the sensation to allow the memory to fuel us through the difficult days.

1. Our study this year is called *Vibrant Faith*. What does the term “vibrant faith” mean to you?

2. Imagine a woman with a vibrant faith, what sets her apart in your mind? What does her schedule look like? What does she do that supports her faith?

3. For a woman with a vibrant faith, is her faith stagnant or growing?

4. Because you are reading this, you are taking steps to partner with the Holy Spirit and grow in faith! Are you willing to make some very small changes in your daily schedule and prayer life to allow the Holy Spirit to work more actively in you?

5. In our study, we will look at ways that the Holy Spirit has worked throughout the Old and New Testament. What questions do you have about the Holy Spirit? What would you like to understand better through this study?

6. What role does your faith play in helping you to face your daily struggles?

7. When Jesus says “nothing will be impossible for you” in Matthew 17:20, do you recognize that He is speaking to you or does it seem as though He is speaking to someone else with a different level of faith? Why?

8. When was the last time that you noticed God in His Holy Spirit working in your life, where have you noticed the Extra-Ordinary in your ordinary day?

Deeper Dive

These questions will not be answered in our small group. Take some time to reflect and answer them honestly in your journal.

1. What is going well in your faith journey?
2. What are the mountains in your life that seem unmovable?
3. Is there a part of your faith that is dormant or dying? Describe it here. (It could be faith that a relationship can be restored, that forgiveness is possible, that God can heal, etc.)
4. Is there a part that is thriving? Name those places.
5. How is your communication with God— are you feeling connected or distracted in prayer? Are you able to pray every day? Is your prayer a conversation or a recitation of memorized prayers. Neither is better. Answering this question now will allow you to look back at the end of the study and see the movement of the Holy Spirit in your prayer.
5. Where are you in the marathon that is your spiritual journey? Look at the questions at the end of the introduction and write about where you are today.
6. If you are facing spiritual discouragement, do you have someone who could encourage you in your spiritual journey? If yes, name them and set aside a time to meet with them. If you can't name someone, pray to the Holy Spirit to put this person in your path and help you to recognize them.
7. When was the last time that you noticed God in His Holy Spirit working in your life, where have you noticed the Extra-Ordinary in your ordinary day?

Spiritual Practice

*For those who are led
by the Spirit of God
are children of God.*

Romans 8:14

We all know that not much happens in our lives when we just read about something. All the knowledge in the world is useless unless it changes the way we act. The Spiritual Practices of Pray, Ponder, and Act are designed to allow you to find the Holy Spirit in your life through prayer, ponder His movements, and then discern what actions to take in response to His promptings. These actions may be related to a shift in perspective, a change in how you treat someone, or a change in your schedule. If you have time, consider trying all three practices each week. This may be a good section for you to read first each week, before you dive into the lesson, so that you are partnering with the Holy Spirit throughout the week. Allow the Holy Spirit to move creatively and work to ignite your Vibrant Faith as He reveals Himself to you more intimately.

When I have 1 minute, I will pray: A prayer to Mary written by Pope Francis. (Pray this for yourself and all of your sisters in faith who are joining you in Vibrant Faith.)

Mother, help our faith! Open our ears to hear God's word and to recognize His voice and call. Awaken in us a desire to follow in His footsteps, to go forth from our own land and to receive His promise. Help us to be touched by His love, that we may touch Him in faith. Help us to entrust ourselves fully to Him and to believe in His love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature. Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One. Remind us that those who believe are never alone. Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that He may be light for our path. And may this light of faith always increase in us, until the dawn of that undying day which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord!

When I have 10 minutes, I will ponder: What are the ways that I have walked by faith? The Holy Spirit is a teacher and will fill us with a deeper understanding of what it means to walk in faith. Just as each person listed in Hebrews 11 was taking some step in faith, you too have stepped out in faith. Ponder some of the ways that you have been faithful to God in the past or are currently being faithful today.

When I have 15 minutes, I will act: Choose from one of the actions below:

A. Create a list of your own “great cloud of witnesses”, pray for each one on your list.

B. Creative Journaling: Choose one verse from our lesson this week that stands out to you. Use your creativity to interpret this verse. You may choose to write the verse out with markers using a creative font. You may draw a picture of the action described in the verse. Or find pictures on the internet and create a collage of the verse.

C. Reach Out: reach out to someone who has played a role in your faith journey and let her/him know what a difference they have made in your life.