

**Life Skills:
A Guide To Change**
By Lanet Hane

**Unit 1
God's Gifts**

How to use this curriculum

This curriculum has been developed with a wide range of personalities, circumstances, and desires in mind. Because of the wide variety of people who will be using this booklet, each “lesson” has been designed with a number of stand-alone pieces. The idea is that as a mentoring pair, you will be able to decide which pieces of the each lesson you want to focus on; some parts will be more relevant to you than others.

This is meant to be a helpful tool, not a “required” textbook. If parts of it hinder your mentoring relationship, don't use them!

Pages 1 & 2: The pieces of the lesson that are likely to be relevant to the largest number of mentoring pairs have been placed in the front. The first couple of pages contain a variety of materials that are likely to create conversation for you and your mentoring pair. Spend as much or as little time on each part as is appropriate and organic for you.

Scripture Verse: Each lesson begins with a verse from Scripture that is relevant to the topic of the lesson. This verse should set the tone for the lesson. If the verse is familiar to both mentor and mentee, it may be appropriate to simply read the verse and return to it at the end of the lesson to discuss how it influenced the meeting. If the verse is unfamiliar to either mentor and mentee, take some time to discuss what the verse is talking about. It might be a good idea to look the verse up and read it in the context of the chapter or book it comes from. The point is to understand how the verse fits into what you are both discussing and learning.

Discussion Question: The first discussion question is located at the beginning of the lesson to get your minds working and focused on the content of the lesson. Some mentoring pairs will spend a large portion of their meeting time simply talking about the first question and never even make it to the rest of the lesson; that's great! For those pairs that don't converse as freely yet, this question offers a great starting point for brief discussion and deeper reflection.

Statement: This is the premise for each lesson. It takes the entire lesson and wraps everything up into a short sentence. The idea with this statement is that you would discuss whether you agree with the statement and that you would give examples from your own experiences regarding its validity. Once again, your pair may spend varying amounts of time considering the statement and that's okay; the point is to give you food for thought and possible discussion topics.

Story: The story is specifically designed for those groups that have a hard time just diving into discussion. It addresses the issue of the lesson in a unique way that will hopefully give you and your mentoring pair a variety of points for discussion.

Quote: Located at the bottom of each page, the quotes serve a couple different purposes. The first purpose is to encourage discussion about the truth or relevance of the quote. The second purpose is to offer a short, specific thought to take away from the lesson. It is unlikely that you or your mentoring pair will remember much specific information or conversation from the lesson, but people tend to remember short quotes more easily.

Page 3: In general, this section of the lesson is designed as a take-home portion. This page will have additional questions, lists, and a variety of other thought-provoking activities that will require you to continue to address the lesson throughout the week. For those pairs that have difficulty getting into lengthy or deep conversations, this page can also be used during the meeting time to further develop your mentoring relationship.

Commitment: The phrase "This week I commit to..." along with some space to write is also included on the third page. This is another opportunity to bring tangible accountability into your mentoring relationship. Use this commitment as an opportunity to choose a specific item/attitude you would like to address in your life. Some weeks you might keep the same commitment you chose the week before, other weeks you might think of a new, specific desire you have for your life. Try to keep these commitments as specific and tangible as possible so that when the next meeting arrives you can discuss whether you accomplished your task.

Page 4: This page is strictly based on Scripture. While Biblical morals and Scriptural references are interspersed throughout each lesson, this section is set aside to encourage a specific time of focus on your faith lives. You will find a variety of depth to these sections; the hope is that each mentoring pair will find something in the Scripture section that fits their own level of Biblical knowledge. Each Scripture section includes opportunities for further reflection.

God's Gifts: Choice

*"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then **choose** for yourselves this day whom you will serve." (Joshua 24:15a)*

Spend some time discussing your reasons for participating in this program. Are there several? Be honest with each other about the variety of motives you may have. It is important they you both understand where the other is coming from so you can move forward together.

Consider this statement together: We choose whether mentoring has meaning.

We are each participating in this mentoring relationship for a different reason; some of us for multiple reasons. Some of us feel like we've lost direction and desire to find a better track in life. Others seek an accountability partner. Some of us are looking for a deeper friendship with someone. Whatever the reasons, it is our choice whether this time together has meaning and influence on our lives. Sure, other factors affect how much we enjoy our time together as mentoring pairs, but we *do* have control over the end results.

We might not like the curriculum. We might not particularly like our mentoring partner. We might not even like the way this program has been put together. But none of those things has the ultimate power to decide whether the program is effective.

Laura comes from a camping background. She has been a part of many discussions, services, programs, and mentoring relationships. She even orchestrated many of them for other people or groups. And she is always amazed at how much control the participants have over the results.

At one camp, staff were handed old bible study books from the '80s and told to read through them each day and find someone to talk with about the devotions.

No further help or instruction.

The books they were given were poorly written, and much of what they said had become irrelevant by then. And all the staff members worked at least sixteen hours a day, usually more, and frequently had entire weeks where they ran on 2-3 hours of sleep a night. They worked hard every day, were sleep deprived almost always, and on top of that were told to use bad materials to further their spiritual development.

Faith is born out of holy discontentment

And yet, everyone took their devotional time seriously. Everyone found time to talk with someone, even if it was only for 10 minutes *while* working on something else together. And because the staff chose to believe transformation could happen, those devotions changed their lives.

We are the ones who decide.

At another place Laura worked, they had bountiful resources. They had access to theologians, pastors, academics, people who were famous worldwide for their efforts in justice. They rarely worked more than 8 hour days, were well rested, and had all these amazing people at their fingertips.

But people made a choice.

People didn't utilize those resources. People chose not to work hard and make the most of what they had. People were okay with not having deep, powerful discussions and because of this apathy, their lives were not as significantly changed as they could have been.

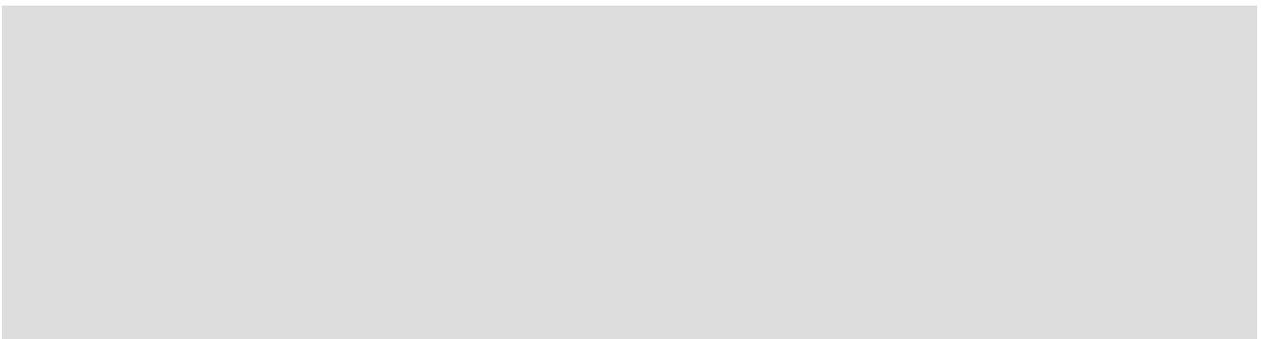
And so the situation that shouldn't have led to change actually had more significant impacts than the situation where change seemed like it would be almost automatic.

Now let's think about this mentoring program again.

If we take the program seriously, we will learn new things about ourselves. If we try to intentionally discuss difficult issues, we will be brought closer to truth. If we prepare and focus each week, we will see transformation.

Do we hope *this curriculum* helps that transformation take place? Definitely! Have we carefully selected mentoring pairs with the desire that deep and meaningful friendships will form? Absolutely! But those things are only part of the picture. The real transformation takes place inside our hearts and minds; and we are the only ones—with God's leading—who are able to affect that change.

Read the story of Saul (later Paul) in Acts 9:1-31. What does this story say about the possibilities of transformation?



Why are you taking part in this mentoring program?

What are you hoping to learn from this mentorship?

In what ways do you want to be held accountable by your mentoring partner?

Complete this sentence: "This mentoring program will be successful for me if...". Explain

This week I commit to:

Faith is born out of holy discontentment

*“For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?
But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”*

~Romans 8:23-25

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see ... By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going ... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

~Hebrews 11:1, 8, 11

Based on the definition of faith provided in Hebrews, I think we can say that faith looks a little different than the way many of us currently define it.

Often times we talk about having faith in our churches and faith means being willing to wait on God to do something; it means being okay with the way things currently are. We define faith as a frame of mind that is willing to just let things be and see what happens. But that is not faith. That is laziness.

Yes, faith means knowing God is in control. But it is not okay with the current state of things; faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not yet see. Who doesn't hope for something more when they watch the news and see what is happening? Who hasn't felt the deep brokenness of the world and said there has got to be something else? If we are not content—and shouldn't be content—with the world as it is, then faith is about hoping for something greater.

Faith is looking around you and saying “This isn't the way things should be, and I believe God can change it.”

Faith is about holy discontentment.

Holy discontentment comes from a place of wanting peace, justice, love, and joy.

Holy discontentment is about knowing that better is coming; it is about know that God desires much more for us than we currently have. So we hope for more, we hope for better; this is faith. Faith is being sure of what we hope for, because we do not yet have it. Faith assumes we are not content with our current situation. Faith assumes we do not currently have what we want, but we know it is coming. We know better is coming because we know that God fulfills his promises, and God has promised to fix the brokenness of this world.

If faith is born out of this holy discontentment, then one of the worst things that could happen to you or to me is that we would become content. Because if we become content we stop hoping for more. If we become content then faith is no longer required, because God has already been faithful in everything we deem necessary.

And so we hope. And in faith we are sure that we do not hope in vain.

Faith is born out of holy discontentment

God's Gifts: Choice

*"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then **choose** for yourselves this day whom you will serve." (Joshua 24:15a)*

Spend a few moments considering and sharing past choices you've both made, both good and bad. Try to discern the consequences of those choices, both the immediate and long-term effects. How much influence do those choices still have on your lives?

Consider this statement together: We have chosen our current life.

Before we talk about any other gifts, we need to discuss the gift of *choice*. Without this gift, none of the others would have any real meaning. We have the ability to decide what to do with our time, how to spend money, how to interact with our families, and the list goes on forever.

Good choices lead to more fruitful, joy-filled lives. Bad choices can bring us into destructive habits and lead into more poor decisions. Some choices don't seem to really have a positive or negative at all; Coke or Pepsi? Chocolate or vanilla? Some choices are confusing; we can't always tell the difference between the good and bad until after we've already made the choice.

Now, we are not always given choices in each situation. Some situations happen that are beyond our control, and some people are in the place they are through no fault of their own. But the majority of the time, we have the opportunity to decide what activities to be part of; even in those situations we cannot control, we are able to choose our reactions and later choices as a result of them.

But the fact that choice exists at all is amazing! That's what life really is—a series of choices. Choice after choice after choice. We *actually* get to decide the life we are going to live—isn't that great?

...Sensing mixed emotions...

Some of us agree that choice is a great blessing and are incredibly thankful for it. Others look back on their choices and wish someone else had just made better ones for them. Most of us are somewhere in the middle; sometimes we really love being able to choose our lives, other times we see choice as a burden.

Regardless of our current emotions regarding choice, it has been given to us and we must learn to use it responsibly.

The life we have is the one we've chosen

Choice is sometimes poorly understood.

We often think we are stuck in our lives as they are without any real opportunities to choose where we will go or what will happen next. We hate our job, but cannot see any way into another career. We wish our relationships were better, but no clear paths towards healthy relationships are visible. We don't think we are able to *choose* anything else.

But choice doesn't mean we have the ability to magically make everything in our lives perfect. We might not realistically be able to quit our job and find a new one right now. Although we do have the *choice* to do that, it would probably be a bad move. But we can choose our attitude at the job we have. We can choose how hard we will work. We can choose how nice we will be to customers. And each of those small choices might lead to our having the choice about whether to accept a promotion.

We might not be able to instantly have a wonderful relationship with our daughter. But we can make small, daily choices that will eventually lead towards that outcome. We may have made poor choices in our past that means we may no longer be able to have the kind of opportunities we would like.

The life we currently have, however, is the life we've chosen.

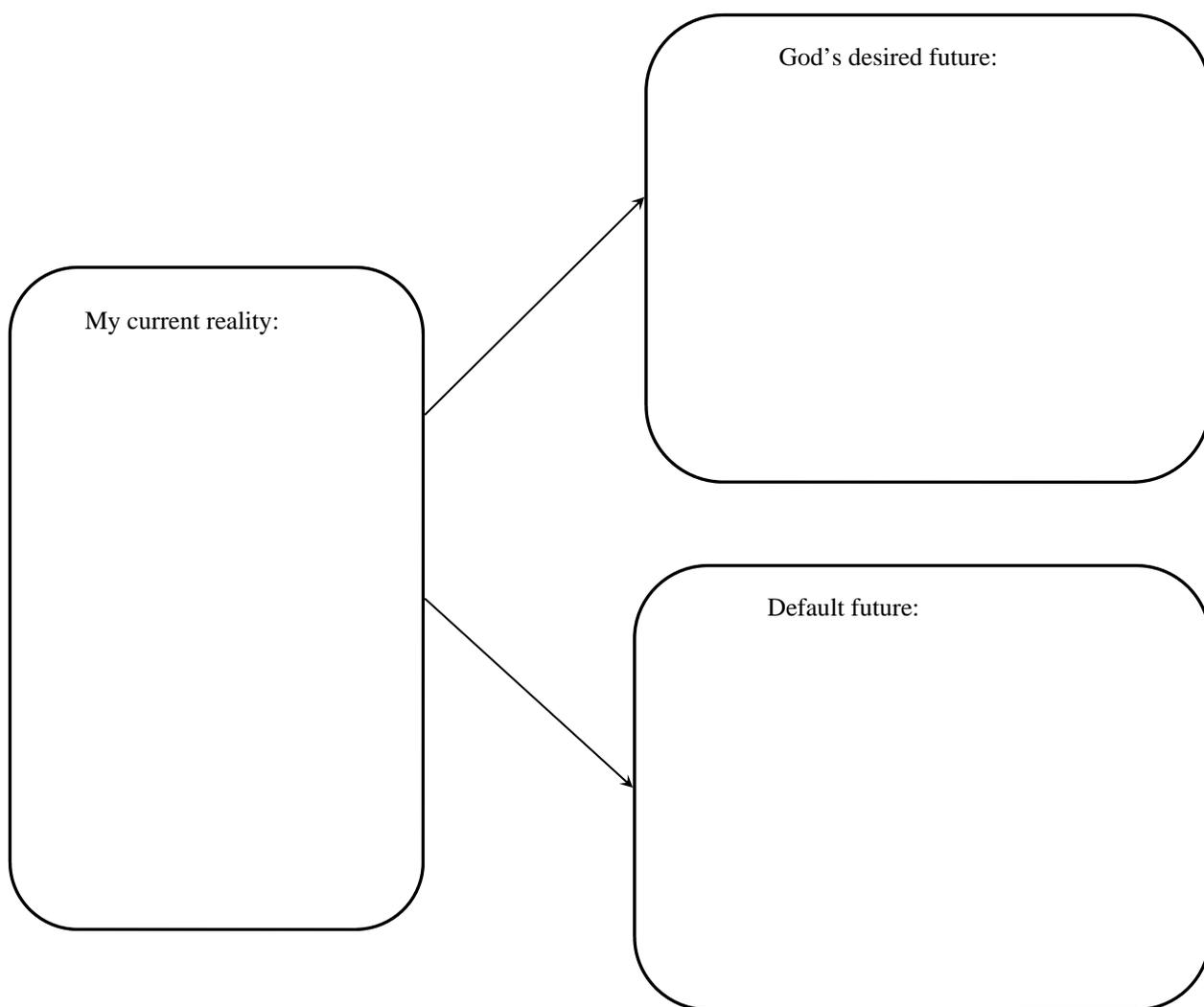
Each small choice we've made has led to where we are, whether we were aware of that happening or not. But now we have the opportunity to make new choices that will lead to something different.

Do you see choice as a blessing or a burden? Why?

What are some important choices you make on a regular basis?

Each choice we make in life is leading us in one of two directions. We are either moving closer towards the future God would like for us to have—a better future—or we are moving towards a default future. The default future is what life will look like if we do not start to make changes. Notice that there is no option for life to remain exactly the same.

Fill out the diagram below putting in the most significant parts of your life and your emotions about them (your current reality). Then think about what your life could look like 5 years from now. Think about what it would look like if you started making more positive changes (God’s desired future) versus what it would look like if you continued on the same path (default future).



This week I commit to:

The life we have is the one we've chosen

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ~Hebrews 11:17

So faith is born out of discontentment and is grounded in hope.

But what exactly does hope look like? Hope, like faith, is often misunderstood as a passive sort of emotion that requires little-to-no action on our part. We picture hope and we see people with their fingers crossed and their eyes lifted to heaven.

But if that is all hope is, then why is it listed along with faith and love as three of the most important parts of our lives? Hope has to be more than merely waiting around for something to happen the way we want.

Abraham is a great example of faith; he is often listed among the fathers of faith in Scripture. But Abraham is also a great example of hope. God promised him many descendants. God promised him an entire nation. Eventually, Abraham was given a son.

One son.

Abraham had no other children who could give him descendants, and he was way too old for more kids. And then God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

And Abraham followed those orders.

Why?

Because of his great faith, and because he hoped for something greater. Think about it. If Abraham was satisfied with his life with his wife and son, he would have said "Sorry, God. I'm good. We can skip having all those heirs." But Abraham hoped for something greater, and that hope led him to act in faith.

Isn't it crazy that when talking about faith, we can't help but bring up hope; and then talking about hope, it can't exist without faith? That's important.

Too often we try to separate out all the different characteristics we should have, all the pieces of the puzzle, and we try to understand exactly how they fit together. But sometimes they are so closely united that we can't do that. Hope exists because we want something better and have faith it will come. Faith exists because we know God will deliver his promises and hope for something more.

That's the story of Abraham. Not just that he had faith that God would find a way to deliver his promises, but that Abraham so hoped for something greater that he was willing to give up his son.

And since Abraham knew God's promise and hoped for it, he acted in faith.

Additional Reading: For a better understanding of the story of Abraham and his son Isaac, read Genesis 21 and 22.

God's Gifts: Choice

*"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then **choose** for yourselves this day whom you will serve." (Joshua 24:15a)*

Many of us look back at the choices we've made and wish we'd made different ones. If you could hit the "reset" button on your life, what is the life that you would choose to be living right now? What decisions would you change?

Consider this statement: We can choose a new life.

Since we know that the life we are currently living is the one we've chosen, whether purposely or incidentally, we should also know that we can choose to live a different life in the future. If poor choices in the past have led us to the point we are currently at, then positive choices in the future should certainly be able to bring us to a better place.

The choices we have made in the past will always affect us. We can't turn back the clock and pretend that some things didn't happen. They did. Certain habits are incredibly difficult to turn away from. The consequences of past actions may mean that we are never able to have the job we want, or the family we desire, or strong relationships with certain family members or friends. Bad choices have negative consequences, and these will always be difficult live with and overcome.

But we can still choose a better life.

For some of us choosing a better life means a complete change of direction. For some of us it means ending certain relationships, changing our current lifestyles, even moving to a new location. Our series of poor choices has been long and complex; there are many habits that need to be changed and attitudes that should be adjusted. In these cases, the process of moving towards a new life will be long and hard.

For others changes might be smaller. We might need to think more carefully about which relationships we are investing in or what activities take up the majority of our time. We might need to consider what role our faith is playing in our lives outside of church or how our current parenting style is affecting our children. Our choices are generally good, but we know that we are not living the fullest, most joyful life that we could. In these cases, the process of moving towards new life will *still* be long and hard.

But anything worth doing is most likely going to be difficult; and choosing new life is definitely worth doing.

And new life requires choice and change.

We are either experiencing profound deep change or slow death ~Robert Quinn

Small changes or big ones, each positive change can lead us towards the better life we have always envisioned. But this better life doesn't just fall into our lap. We need to work for it. We need to make choices that will lead us in that direction.

Let's think of this transformation in the same way people think about weight loss.

There are lots of plans out there that claim to make people lose all the weight they want really fast and without any work.

We know they are scams.

How many people do you know who actually lost 50 pounds taking diet pills? How many people using the Atkins diet or drinking Slim fast twice a day lost their weight doing absolutely nothing else?

I'm guessing your list of people is pretty short.

That's because losing weight, and keeping weight off, takes work. It is a slow process that requires people to rethink their eating habits, their exercise habits, and their sleeping habits. People don't just lose 40 pounds in a week because they've decided that's important.

And for those people who don't need to lose much weight, but are thinking about the swim suit they want to wear for the summer, looking good in that swim suit still takes work. Even just a little weight, or more muscle, takes time and energy.

People don't change quickly.

Transforming our lives into the new ones we want follows the same principles as transforming our bodies. Our lives won't change automatically because we decided they should. Our lives don't suddenly become perfect because we got rid of one bad habit or added something good to our lives.

Our lives change slowly.

We need to work at change. We need to wake up each morning and choose better choices than the day before. We need to realize that we might not see results for weeks, months, or even years.

And we have to keep trying.

Because once we give up, once we decide that it isn't worth the work, we've lost. We will not see transformation happen if we aren't willing to make the effort. We will not have the better life we could if we do not keep moving forward and trying for more than we had before.

What are some places in my life that I expect instant change?

What are spaces in my life that I would like to be different?

What work do I need to do on a daily basis to begin the process of change?

What habits do I want to change and why?

This week I commit to:

We are either experiencing profound deep change or slow death ~Robert Quinn

*“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.”
Hebrews 11:13*

Read Hebrews 11: 17-40.

This list of heroes in Scripture is interesting. Each person listed was filled with faith and with hope (as we know the two to be inseparable), and those two traits led them to action. They acted on the promises of God that they knew. And they acted in ways that didn't necessarily benefit them immediately, or even at all. They wanted a better life for themselves, but they also wanted better lives for their families and nations even after their own deaths.

The lives of these people stand in contrast to our idea of faith and hope. Often times we say “I have faith God can heal me, I have hope that something better will come, so I'll wait.” And we do nothing. We do nothing because we have been taught that God shouldn't need our help. That God can take care of it on his own. We believe we are more “spiritual” if we just sit and wait. But we know now that faith and hope require action.

The men and women of Hebrews 11 knew the promises of God; they knew that God would take care of it. And so they acted on those promises. They knew that without action, faith becomes nothing more than knowledge. They knew that hope and faith that God would fulfill God's promises meant that they would live their lives differently. They knew that they needed to live in ways that *assumed* God's promises would come true.

Moses' parents had hope of a better future, and so acted on that hope in hiding their son.

Rahab had faith that the Israelite God was the true God, and so hid the spies.

Their faith led them to act differently, and to persevere through difficult situations.

When we take a close look at these heroes, they remind us that our faith should affect our lives. It is not enough for our hope and faith to influence the way we think on Sunday, or even the way we think daily; our faith should influence the choices we make throughout our lives.

They also remind us that knowing the promises of God is vital to acting in faith.

Abraham knew God's promises, and believed according to that knowledge. Moses also knew God's promises to the people of Israel. We can know God's promises for us by reading the promises he has written into Scripture. We can know them by studying and reading and interacting with the text of the Bible. And as we know the promises, we can act in faith.

By faith we live. By faith we move. By faith we have our being.

God's Gifts: Time

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity. (Ephesians 5:15, 16a)

Spend a few moments together discussing society's perception of time, the church's, and your own. What is time? What is it used for? Why is it important? Discuss what influences these perceptions. Think about the lives of those you respect and admire. Why do you respect them? What role does time play in their lives?

Consider this statement together: Time is not the issue

Let's talk about closets

Yes, closets—those places in our bedrooms that hold huge amounts of clothing options, and probably a decent number of dust bunnies.

Closets are neither good or bad. They are simply storage places to hold some of the things we value in life. They do not often illicit strong emotions from us. Sure, some are smaller than others, and if we don't have one at all we might covet someone's closet. But generally we don't look at another person's closet and say “Wow, I want your closet!”

When we look inside the closets of other people and feel strong emotions, it is because we look at what their closet CONTAINS and want similar items to hang in our own storage spaces. We see designer shoes, bags, or suits and long to have our own closets filled with such nice things. We see bright, rich colors and suddenly what fills our closet seems drab and dull. We see organized, well-placed racks and bins neatly situated and desire to have our closets look so tidy.

The same concept applies to the way we view time. While there are circumstances that make some covet time itself (old age, a terminal illness), what we desire most are the pursuits people fill their time with. We don't really want more time, we want more meaningful things to fill our time. We often say “If I only had another hour each day”, when what we really mean is “I want more sleep” or “I would love to have those conversations” or “I want to be with my children”. We don't actually want another hour in the day; we want to be doing different and better things with the hours we have.

The real problem is that we *think* what we are lacking is time. We *think* that another hour each day will mean that we get more sleep, or have more meaningful conversations, or spend more time with our children.

God has given us enough time to do everything that God wants us to do.

We *think* we need a bigger closet, when we really just need to put different things in our closet. We *think* that if we just had a bigger closet, we would put different, better things in it.

We are wrong.

Deep down, we know we don't need a bigger closet. The clothes we choose to put in a small closet are going to be the same ones we put in a bigger one; there will just be more of them. Beautiful, better things won't just magically appear. We have to put them there. We need to decide that we are collecting the wrong sorts of things in our tiny closets, and we have to make the decision to clear out everything that we don't want or use and replace it with what is useful and desirable.

Deep down, we also know that time is not the issue. We know that if we had another hour each day, we would probably just work longer, or watch more television, or fill that space in some other way we are already in the habit of doing. More time won't magically make our lives better. We need to put beautiful moments into the time we already have. We need to decide that we are spending our precious time on the wrong sorts of things and make the decision to clear out everything from our lives that we don't want or need and replace those activities with what is useful, necessary, and desirable.

Share a moment when you felt that someone else had more time than you.

Do I view time as the issue? Why or why not?

Why do I often think I need more time?

What are some moments this past week where I believed time was the issue?

What would change in my life if I lived daily with the idea that time is not the issue?

What ways do I see others using their time that I would like to include in my life?

What is preventing me from using time the way I would like to?

To make life itself an art—that is the goal of living in the present moment.
-Jerry Sittser (the Will of God as a Way of Life)

This week I commit to:

God has given us enough time to do everything that God wants us to do.

Kairos: decisive point, right moment; often with the sense of being divinely ordained.

In Scripture, we see a few different Greek words that can be translated “time”. The two most popular words are *kairos* and *chronos*. We’ll talk about *chronos* later, but for now let’s consider the meaning, use, and implications of the word *kairos*.

Kairos is a word used to address the quality of time. There are other words used to speak about specific lengths and certain periods of time; *kairos* is uniquely chosen to emphasize the quality, importance, and beauty of time. It emphasizes the content of the moment, rather than simply a period of existence. While *chronos* would describe hours or minutes, *kairos* more elusively addresses “a powerful moment” or “a meaningful span of time”.

In Scripture, *kairos* is often used when issuing a challenge to the followers of Christ:

“Therefore, as we have *kairos*, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:10)

Here, the fact that the believers have the gift of *kairos* is reason enough to assume they should be doing good (the actual words for “do good” are much more forceful in the Greek). The believers don’t simply have extra hours or spans of time lying around unwanted; they have beautiful moments that are to be celebrated by service.

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every *kairos*...” (Ephesians 5:15, 16a)

Once again, the believers are exhorted not to misuse their quality moments. They are to wisely consider every blessed span of time and live in a manner that cherishes that.

If Christians in the New Testament were challenged to notice and carefully live out their *kairos* moments, that has serious implications for our lives as Christians today. Not only are we expected to be wise and careful and loving in the way we live, but we are also challenged to recognize that time itself has meaning and significance.

We must live into *kairos*.

More references to *kairos*:

Romans 13:11

Romans 5:6

Mark 12:2

Colossians 4:5

Ephesians 6:18

Matthew 13:30

John 7:6, 8

Matthew 24:45

God has given us enough time to do everything that God wants us to do.

God's Gifts: Time

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3: 17)

Spend a few moments together discussing your perception of time and how it has changed in the past two weeks. What is time? What is it used for? Why is it important? Discuss your commitments these last two weeks.

Consider this statement together: How we spend our time demonstrates our priorities

Let's return to the idea of time as a closet.

Some of us have fairly small closets, others have giant walk-ins. Some of us have closets that are our own, others share with a significant other. But it doesn't matter; they are ALWAYS full. No matter the size of our closet, we all manage to fill them up with "things" that we've bought or acquired.

Most people have the custom of going through these closets occasionally. When it starts to overflow, or a new season comes around, or we make a new year's resolution—whatever the reason, we get to a point where we decide that there's too much stuff in the closet and some of it needs to go.

We don't just pick things at random to throw out, though. We don't decide that our shoes take up the most space and therefore need to be tossed. We don't just take the items that are easily within reach. No, we carefully sift through the contents of the closet.

We don't immediately throw out all our shoes; if they take up the most space, it's probably because we consider them important. We go through them and consider which pairs we no longer enjoy. We don't take items from the front, because we know they are the things we wear most often. We reach into the back and search for those things we forgot took up space.

We DIG.

And in the end of our cleaning frenzy, after we have dug to the very back and bottom of our seemingly endless closets, we've discovered a heaping pile of "things" we don't need or want (or maybe didn't even know we had) taking up our valuable closet space. Our closet is no longer overflowing, everything has its place, and there might even be some spaces for new things in the future.

God has given us enough time to do everything that God wants us to do.

What if time was a closet?

What if everything your life was comprised of (sleep, work, family time, shopping, doctors visits, making supper, cleaning the bathroom, watching TV) had to fit into that closet? What would your closet look like? Would it be overflowing with too many things? Would it have only a few things hanging from the hangers? Would it be filled with random heaps, or would everything be organized neatly?

And even more importantly, would you LIKE what was in it? Would you like the things you found in your closet when you opened it? Would you know what was there? Or would you reach to the back and find all sorts of junk you didn't know you had, taking up valuable space?

Maybe it's time that you did some "spring cleaning".

Consider all the ways you spend your time. DIG. Look in the very back of the closet, the ways you use your time that you didn't even realize. Ask yourself: "Do I really want this to take up valuable space in my closet?"

Consider what TYPES of items hang in your "time closet". Is your closet filled with frivolous extras, leaving you with little time to spend on basic, necessary things? Do you spend all your time in one area, creating a time closet filled with only shoes; or is your wardrobe complete, allowing for a variety of activities and priorities in your life?

You can't change the amount of time you have; your closet won't get any bigger. But you can make different decisions about what fills it.

What is important to us will become evident in the way we live and the time we invest. Take some time to fill out the charts on the next page, discussing each chart in depth as you go. Pay special attention to how the use of your time is evidence of your priorities.

What are some things that take up my time that I don't generally realize? (those items in the back of the closet that I have to dig for)

Main ways I spend my time:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

What this says my priorities are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

We can't do everything! But we do have choices about *which* tasks and opportunities consume our time.

What I WANT my priorities to be:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

Main ways I WILL spend my time:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

This week I commit to:

God has given us enough time to do everything that God wants us to do.

Chronos: time, period of time; generally refers to specific lengths or moments

We've discussed *kairos*—meaningful moments—but what about all the rest? What about the minutes that make up my morning routine, or the hours that fill my work day? What about that two hour drive to the mall? Or the length of minutes I use every time I go grocery shopping?

There's nothing "special" about each of these periods of time. They aren't necessarily *kairos* moments. They are just lengths of time in which I accomplish the various tasks that make up what we call life.

This is where *chronos* is used.

"Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole *chronos* the Lord Jesus went in and out among us," (Acts 1:21)

After Jesus had risen and was taken back up into heaven, the eleven remaining disciples needed to choose someone to replace Judas Iscariot (who had committed suicide after betraying Jesus). They decided that the person they chose must be someone who had spent *chronos* with the rest of the disciples. Sure, meaningful *kairos* moments would necessarily be a part of Jesus' ministry on earth, but the disciples here are emphasizing the importance of general "spans of time". They didn't want to pick someone who had some great moments with Jesus and the disciples; they wanted to choose from among those with which they had shared *chronos*.

"I hope to spend some *chronos* with you, if the Lord permits." (1 Cor. 16:7b)

This statement assumes that by sharing *chronos*, the body of Christ will be strengthened. Here Paul is demonstrating that time itself, without specific reference to what is done with that time, is beneficial. Once again, Paul's understanding of time will come as a direct challenge to our own views.

If Paul desires to simply come and share time with the Corinthians, and places value in that without feeling a need to include how that time will be spent, what does that say for the *chronos* periods in our lives? What does that say about how we should view the hours that comprise our work day? Or our sleep? Or watching TV with our kids? Or cleaning? When we begin to look at how Scripture views time, both *kairos* and *chronos*, we are forced into the uncomfortable realization that we have misunderstood.

Additional understanding: Read the entire chapter about time in Fred Edie's "Book, bath, table, and time". Pay particular attention to how new understandings of the relativity of time affect our perception of time and how it operates in our lives.

God has given us enough time to do everything that God wants us to do.

God's Gifts: Our Bodies

"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." (Hebrews 4:9, 10)

Spend a few moments together discussing the rhythm of your days and the amount of stress typical for you. Where is your time focused? Who requires the majority of your energy? How much anxiety is normal in your life? What are your stressors?

Consider this statement together: We need to relax.

We live in a time where busyness is expected. We are expected to do so many things and be connected to so many people that we often neglect to care for ourselves. We get less sleep than we need, and we make up for that by consuming large amounts of caffeine. We fill our weekends with all sorts of jobs and activities and skip Sabbath. Those of us who are parents spend our evenings caring for our children— often quickly grabbing whatever food is available. That book we've been wanting to read sits un-opened by our bed, the recipe we want to try remains tacked to our fridge, and the idea that we should exercise more remains at the back of our minds.

And on those rare occasions when we DO give priority to our own needs, we tend to be crushed by feelings of guilt and inadequacy. If we decide to turn our cell phone off for a day or two, we feel horrible when we find out that people couldn't reach us when they wanted to. We see time spent catching up with an old friend or watching our favorite TV show as time wasted; as time that could have been used for someone else.

This is a tragedy.

The current belief that we should consider our own needs and desires only after we have fulfilled all the needs and desires of everyone around us is tragic for several reasons, but here we will only address the negative affects it has on our physical and spiritual health.

Stress is bad.

This is a commonly understood truth. Researchers and doctors across the world have studied the effects of stress on physical and emotional well-being. They concluded that, without doubt, consistent high levels of stress are detrimental on our health. Stress has been linked to high blood pressure, depressed immune systems, heart attack, and many other medical issues. It has also been tied to lower job performance, high levels of irritability, and depression.

Receive the day with delight and gratitude

Yet we continue to exist in lives that are filled to the brim with activity after activity; we continue to push our bodies farther than they should go. We add responsibility after responsibility to our already crowded schedules until we are stuck in a juggling act with no way out. We feel anxious and know we are stressed, but we try to disregard this knowledge, pushing forward regardless of the unintended consequences. We have to get things done, after all.

While living meaningful lives does require productivity and action, our society as a whole tends to overlook one of the key factors involved in being efficient, healthy, productive people; we overlook our need for rest. We act as though our stress will never catch up with us. We act as though caring for our bodies is a luxury our busy lives can't afford. But the truth is just the opposite.

Our bodies have to rest. Our minds need to recharge; we don't function at our best when we don't have enough physical and emotional rest.

If leisurely reading relaxes us, then that book by the bed NEEDS to be opened. That recipe on the fridge SHOULD be used. And we need to reach into the back of the closet and pull out the yoga mat. We need to relax, refresh, and renew so that when the next day comes around we can give it our all.

We need to stop acting like we can do everything; we are NOT God. And even God took a Sabbath...

Why don't we? Why have we convinced ourselves that relaxation and renewal are "extras" in our lives? Why do we feel guilty when we take care of ourselves?

Why?

Create a list of reasons you choose not to rest:

Create a list of things that make you feel anxious or stressed:

Create a list of things that make you feel rested, relaxed, or refreshed:

What prevents you from taking part in activities that refresh you?

This week I commit to:

Receive the day with delight and gratitude

The task for Christians is to “receive the day” God has given with delight and gratitude. God, who is the creator of time, gives creation ample time for work, for blessing, and for rest. The operative description for time as God’s good gift is abundance, not scarcity. God provides more than enough time for God’s people to live a good life.

-Fred P. Edie (Book, Bath, Table, and Time)

I think this would be a good time to address the underlying problems with our unwillingness to slow down and rest.

When God created this world, he gave people a pattern to follow with their lives. God worked six days, and then on the seventh he rested. God told us in Scripture he expected a similar pattern of work and rest (Exodus 20:8-10). Later in the New Testament, Jesus explains the reason for a Sabbath rest to the people (Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 6:1-10). Jesus explained that times of rest and renewal are mixed in with work because people need them. People can’t just keep working constantly; eventually they wear out. And so rest was part of the pattern God created for us.

When we refuse to rest from our work, we are essentially saying that we know more than God. We are saying that God was wrong when he told the people to rest. Even if we don’t consciously believe we know better than God, our actions prove that some part of us thinks God just doesn’t understand our lives.

Now, some of us lack the appropriate amount of rest because we are so caught up in serving our churches, communities, or families. We are stressed because we are actively pursuing God’s redeeming work in the world. Surely, then, we are justified in not having enough rest?

No, we are not.

With this mindset we are not only saying that God was wrong in asking us to rest, but we are also saying that God *needs* us to fulfill his plan. We are saying that—without us and our important work—God cannot do what he desires. God *needs* us.

This is entirely untrue and is very dangerous theology.

We need to have faith that God has given us the time to do everything he wants us to do. And included in that time is periods of necessary rest. So at times when it seems you won’t be able to complete all the tasks you need to; remind yourself that God has created us to live in both work and rest. When you make sure you’ve had sufficient times of rest, then you can completely focus on the remaining work. Remember, God has given us enough time to do everything that God wants us to do.

Additional understanding: Talk to a local pastor or youth leader about what they do to slow down and rest. These people need to be very intentional about renewing themselves for their work and will have good insights for you.

God's Gifts: Our Bodies

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price . Therefore honor God with your body.” (1Corinthians 6:19, 20)

Spend a few moments together discussing reasons for eating well and exercising daily. How much influence does physical appearance have in your decisions? What other factors affect your health decisions?

Consider this statement together: Our health choices have immediate effects

America spends more than 20% of its gross domestic product on health care; almost 75% of those costs go towards largely preventable diseases. This is a staggering number, and it continues to rise. Over a third of the U.S. population is obese, and this number is also growing. As a nation, we average less than 7 hours of sleep a night; this amount triples our likelihood of contracting a cold and other viruses.

Why do I mention this statistics?

Because we need to realize that our poor health choices have a number of consequences. We shouldn't desire to eat right and exercise often simply to fit the mold of what “a good body” should look like. Actually, it is possible to be a very healthy person and be a few sizes larger than people would consider “right”. While caring for our bodies *can* help us to be more physically beautiful—and we all desire to be considered good-looking— caring for our bodies has a number of other positive effects we don't often realize.

One of the obvious positive effects is better overall health and fewer medical problems. Being sick often means we work less. Medications cost money and doctors' visits can be expensive. But most of us know this. What we don't always realize is the effect that our habits can have on our *day to day* wellbeing. Never mind the long-term effects for now; let's talk about the *immediate* results.

That's right; the food we eat, exercise we do, and sleep we get directly impacts our day.

People who receive the appropriate amounts of nutrients have better moods. They feel more energetic throughout the day and claim more positive thoughts. It is the same for those who exercise consistently. People who consistently exercise have been shown to have lower levels of stress. The way the nutrients and chemicals from food and exercise work in the body make it so that when we eat well, we feel better. When we exercise—even if we are tired—we have more energy. This is scientific fact.

Our bodies are gifts from God

And it is also fact that our bodies learn while we sleep. You know the old saying “just sleep on it”? It turns out there’s a scientific reason behind the principle. Our bodies sort through all sorts of information while we are sleeping; our bodies are actually capable of learning tremendous amounts while we are sleeping—even more than when we are awake. So when we don’t get adequate amounts of sleep, our bodies are forced to do all that learning while we are awake. This may be the reason why people who don’t get enough sleep have memory trouble, difficulty grasping new concepts, and difficulty focusing.

So instead of saying “I don’t have time to sleep eight hours a night”, we should realize that it is those of us who are most busy and have the most to learn who *need* the most rest. We are asking our bodies to perform an incredible number of tasks; our bodies need the sleep to sort through everything so we are able to be efficient when we awake.

Instead of saying “I’m too tired to exercise”, we should realize that it is those of us who are most busy and exhausted who actually *need* to exercise. We need to give our bodies the chance to become energized; the chance that exercise gives it.

And instead of heading to the cupboard after a bad day and pulling out our favorite junk food saying “I just need some comfort food”, we should realize that those foods are the exact *opposite* of a pick-me-up. Our bodies need the right nutrients in order to be in balance and to feel good. Without the right nutrients our mood is unlikely to improve.

So instead of seeing sleep, exercise, and good food as luxuries we can’t afford, we need to start looking at them as *necessities* we can’t live without. They should be staples in our closet.

In the past, what have been your main reasons for trying to eat healthier, exercise more, or sleep longer?

What reasons prevent you from caring well for your body?

Just as we encourage people to keep away from a variety of harmful activities by having a plan—we should also have a strategy in place to help us care for our bodies.

What situations tend to make you want to eat well or exercise?

Who around you encourages you to live healthily?

What situations tend to help you get enough sleep?

What are some ways you can live that will encourage positive situations to develop?

This week I commit to:

Our bodies are gifts from God

Too often Christians try to put different pieces of their lives in different categories.

Prayer time is part of the spiritual life, cooking dinner isn't. Going to church is spiritual, going to work isn't. Meditation and times of solitude are spiritual, eating well and exercising aren't.

But this mentality goes against what Scripture teaches us about the holistic life of a Christian. The Bible tells us that *all* parts of our life have now been redeemed by Jesus Christ and are to be treated that way. No one piece of our life is more "spiritual" than others.

All parts of our life should be used for God's glory.

"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." ~1 Corinthians 10:31

This includes our eating and exercising habits.

So in reality, we need to decide whether the foods we are eating are helping to care for the gift of our bodies. The next time you are sitting around the table asking God to "bless this food to our bodies", and it is food with no nutrients, consider whether that is the prayer you should be really offering.

We need to look at how much food we consume and ask whether eating that much is glorifying God. We also need to ask if the amount of food we are consuming is preventing others from being able to eat.

"Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?" ~1 Corinthians 6:19a

We need to think about how often we exercise and consider what that is doing to our bodies. If our bodies are holy temples dedicated to the Lord's use, we should want them to be in good condition.

The ways we care for our physical bodies reflect our appreciation of the gift God has given us. Our bodies are holy gifts to be used for God's glory, and should be treated as such. Our bodies are part of our spiritual act of worship, and we want to worship God well and completely.

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is your spiritual act of worship." ~Romans 12:1

This isn't an idea we hear very often. In fact, most churches have fellowship times that include eating and drinking foods that are often not very healthy. Youth groups often have parties filled with chips, ice cream, soda, and a variety of nutritionally-void foods.

I don't recall ever hearing a sermon on the sinfulness of not exercising.

And yet, the Bible is very clear that we can't separate out the parts of ourselves that belong to God and the parts that don't. God requires that we submit all of ourselves to him. That includes our bodies.

God's Gifts: Work

*"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work** it and take care of it."
~Genesis 2:15*

Spend a few moments together discussing your jobs (homemaker counts!). Do you enjoy your jobs? What do you think of your bosses or co-workers? Are you in the job you would like to be in, or is there another profession you would prefer?

Consider this statement together: Work has inherent value.

Consider Laura, who worked in a fast-food restaurant. Working alongside her at this restaurant were people from many different backgrounds. She worked with high school students, full-time mothers, former drug dealers, people who were deacons in their churches, and a few other post-college young adults. Within that variety, however, there were two main types of people; people who enjoyed work, and people who didn't. Guess which ones she hoped to see when she went to work?

Both groups of people were accomplishing the same tasks, but those who came to work with a positive attitude and the desire to enjoy their day made the experience a positive one for Laura. These people understood that they worked in order to make money, but they also knew they were providing a service to others. They took pride in their food and wanted to give the best service to people. They understood that their attitude affected others, and they saw no reason to be upset that they had to spend the day working.

They enjoyed working.

The other group was really difficult to work with each day. They did as little as possible, complained, gossiped, and were just irritable in general. They approached work as a necessary evil required to receive their paycheck at the end of each week.

All of the workers did the same things; all had the same requirements. But some chose to see the value of what they were doing, while others refused to see any redeeming qualities in working in a fast food restaurant.

But what happens if we start to look at work differently? Work doesn't need to be seen as an evil, it doesn't need to be a negative part of our lives we just need to get "through" to participate in the better parts of life.

What if work were valuable just because it was work?

Opportunity is missed by most because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. ~Thomas Edison

Work is often seen as a necessary evil. We need to pay our bills, purchase groceries, and have funds for a variety of other purposes—so we work. Some of us have jobs we went to college to learn, others work in factories, at restaurants, or on farms doing basic tasks or manual labor. But in almost every case, we work—at least in part—to have money to buy the things we want and need.

The idea of work as valuable simply *because it is good* is an unusual concept. We don't often talk about loving our job because it is a chance for us to do something we are good at. Or because we are able to create a product for someone else. Or because work is our chance to give our share to others.

But what if we decided to think that way? Our attitudes of work, and our enjoyment of it, would be very different. We would go to our jobs in the morning with a sense of purpose and value. We wouldn't work just for the weekend. Sure, we would still have bad days at work sometimes, but they would become the unusual.

In order for each of us to live the type of life we've become accustomed to, most of us work at least 40 hours each week. That means that the largest part of each week day is consumed by the working hours.

So doesn't it make sense that we should enjoy our work?

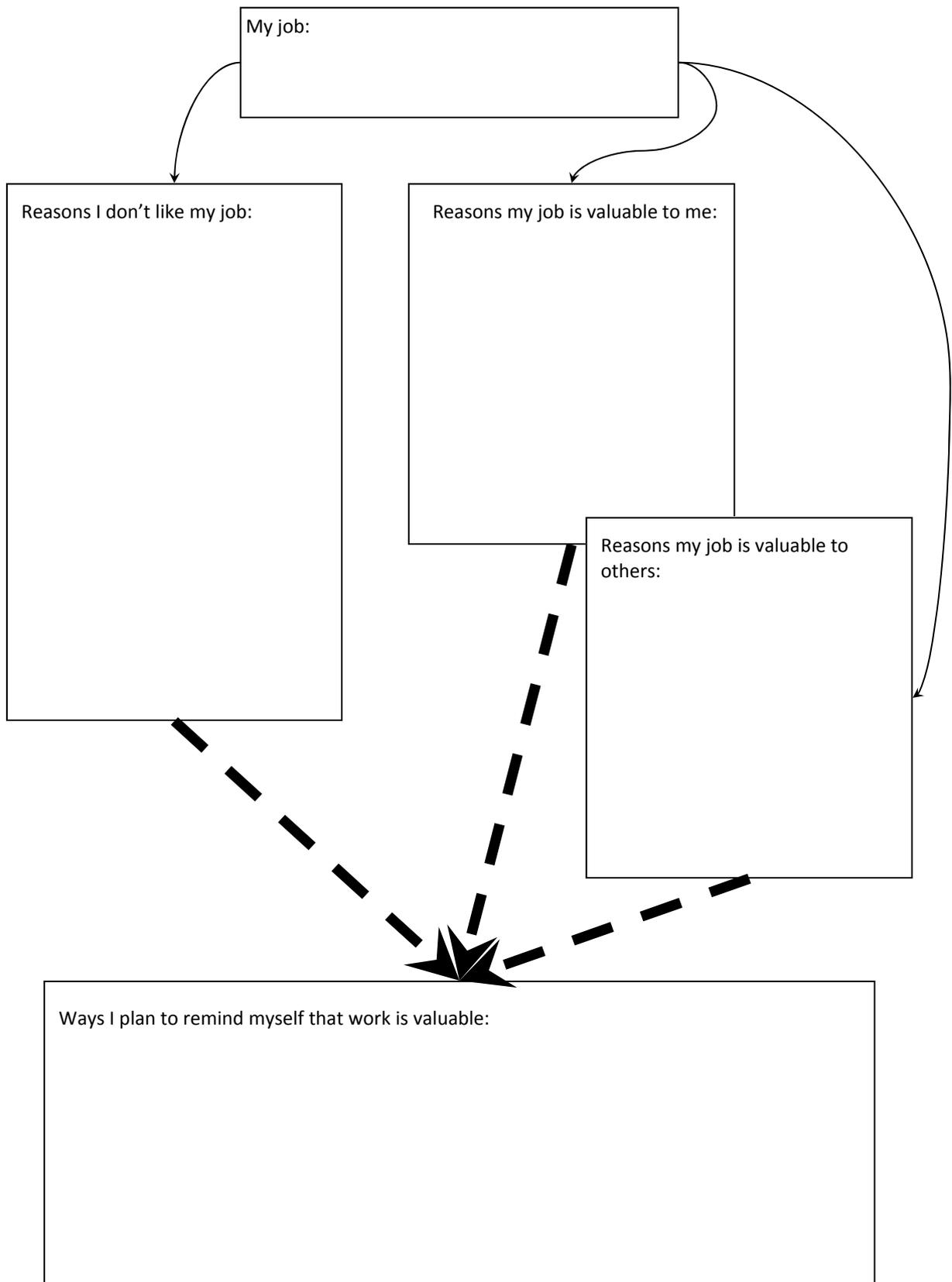
If it consumes such a large portion of our time, shouldn't we desire that they be fun, purposeful, meaningful hours? Shouldn't we want to enjoy all of life? Are we really okay with having 1/3 of it be lived in a mundane, negative, less-than-desirable job?

Thinking back to Laura's time in that restaurant, we can understand that the drastic differences in people and their attitudes towards the job were not really based on different life situations. The differences came from each person's unique understanding of the nature of work. Those who saw the inherent goodness of working and serving others enjoyed their time. Those who couldn't see past the need for financial security had much more difficulty.

Which person do you want to be?

And more significantly, how are you going to become that person?

This week I commit to:



Opportunity is missed by most because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. ~Thomas Edison

*“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work** it and take care of it.”
~Genesis 2:15*

We rarely see work as a piece of God’s perfect plan for humanity.

But in the very beginning of scripture, before Adam and Eve ate the apple and sin entered the world, work *already* existed.

God gave Adam the task of caring for the garden. God gave Adam a *job*.

For many of us, this realization presents a fairly significant problem.

If work existed before sin entered the world, then work must have inherent value. It cannot be the result of sin. It cannot be a necessary evil we just need to get through. If God saw work as a good thing to give to Adam, then we need to take some time to re-think our current perceptions about what work is and why it has value.

Take some time together to read the following passages and ask these three questions:

- 1) What type of work is this passage addressing?
- 2) What attitude does this passage have towards work?
- 3) Why does the passage believe work to be valuable (or not valuable)?

Genesis 2:2

Genesis 39:1-6

Exodus 5:4-18

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

1 Corinthians 3:6-10

Genesis 29: 14-30

Exodus 1:12-14

2 Chronicles 24: 12-13

2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13

There is a common theme among these passages. Work itself is never seen through a negative light. Even the passages describing the work of the Israelites during their time in slavery do not view the existence of work as negative—it is the excessive amount of work that is the problem there. Time and time again work is understood to be a natural part of life and of serving our Creator God.

We need to begin to see work as valuable if we are going to live into the lives God desires for us. Because the lives God has for us require work. And that’s okay.

Because work is good.

Additional Understanding: Read the book of Ruth. Take some time to consider how Ruth’s life was influenced by the work that she performed. What might her life have looked like if she had not chosen to work hard?

God's Gifts: Work

Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!"

~Mark 2:27,28

What is your perception of the purpose of work? What would you do with your time if you weren't working?

Consider this statement: Work is part of life's rhythm.

Why are we here ?

This is a deep question, and one that many of us don't feel we can answer well. But asking this question is key to our understanding of the role of work in our lives. We need to ask the question of why we are here so that we can then ask the question; why do we work?

If we exist only because of random chance, then work is incidental. If we exist for the single purpose of feeling pleasure, then work is not really necessary. So the question of "why are we here?" becomes important.

I think most of us—Christian or not—would agree that there's more to life than looking to the next exciting thing. Most of us would agree that how we live matters; we would agree that our lives aren't accidents.

We believe that life has purpose.

As we seek to understand purpose, it helps for us to look at the rhythm that has been created for our lives. We sleep, we play, and we work. These activities are meant to be interspersed in such a way that our lives are balanced.

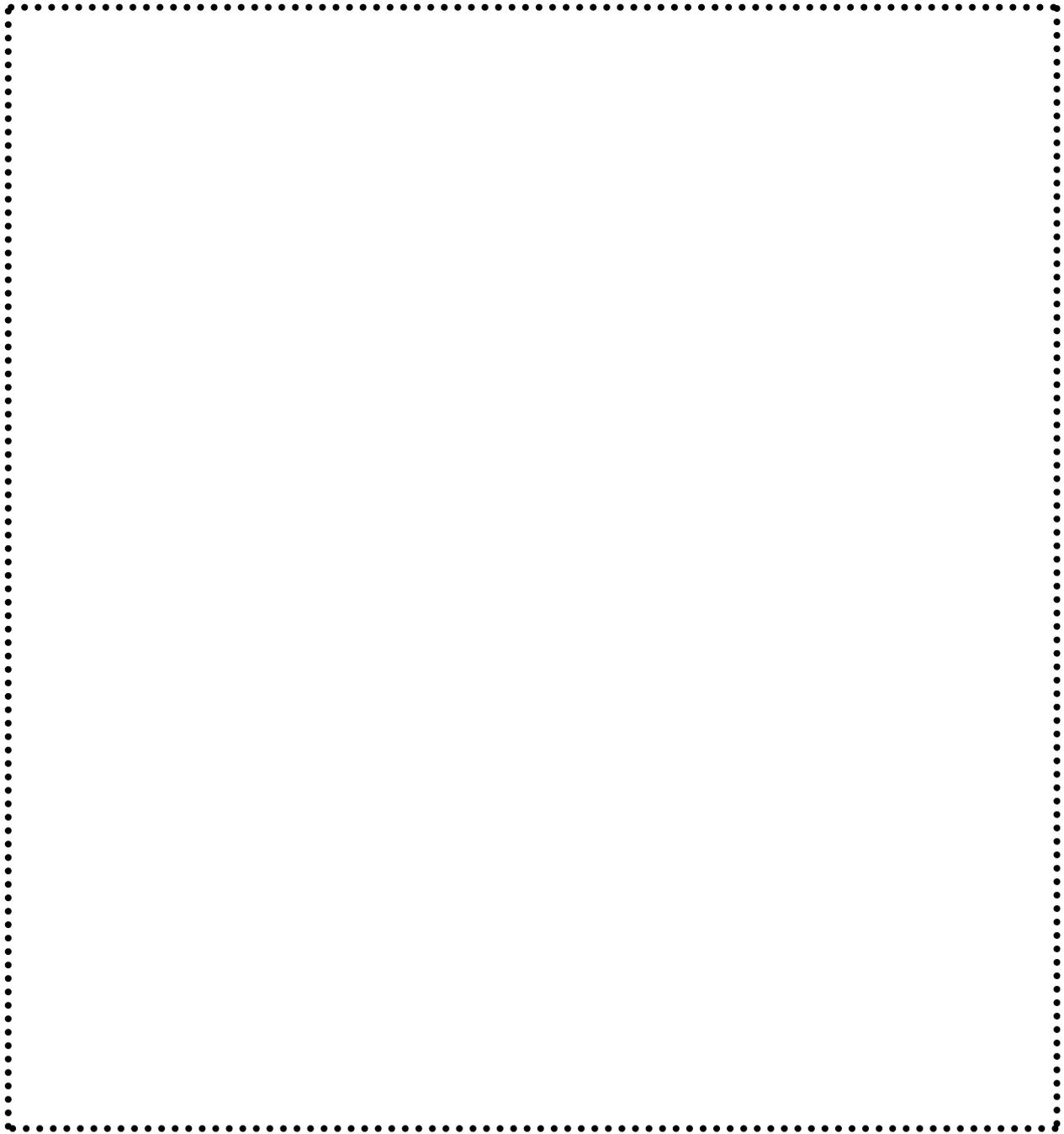
Work is part of the rhythm intended for our lives.

Without the rhythm of work, our lives quickly lose focus and we become wrapped up in ourselves and our own pleasure. Think about times in your life when you had a large amount of free time; how did you use it? For most of us, the answer would involve some sort of activity that was completely focused on ourselves. For many of us, the answer would include very little worthwhile activity. When we have large periods of time to waste, that's usually exactly what we do—we waste it.

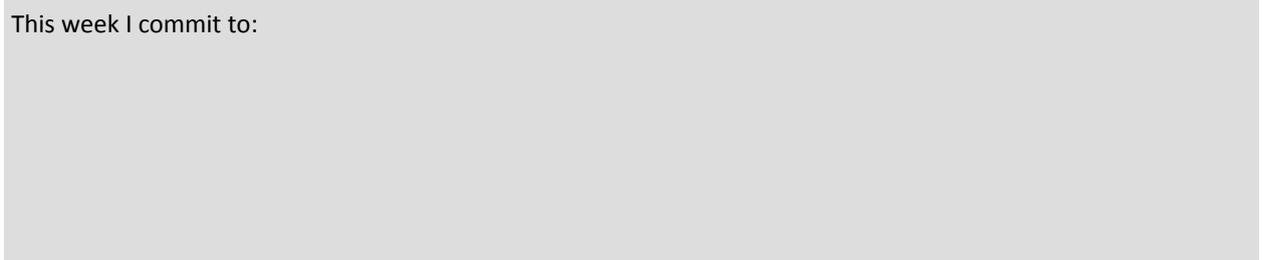
Rhythms are put in place so that we can experience life to its fullest. Without these rhythms, we miss out on much of what life has to offer us.

Opportunity is missed by most because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. ~Thomas Edison

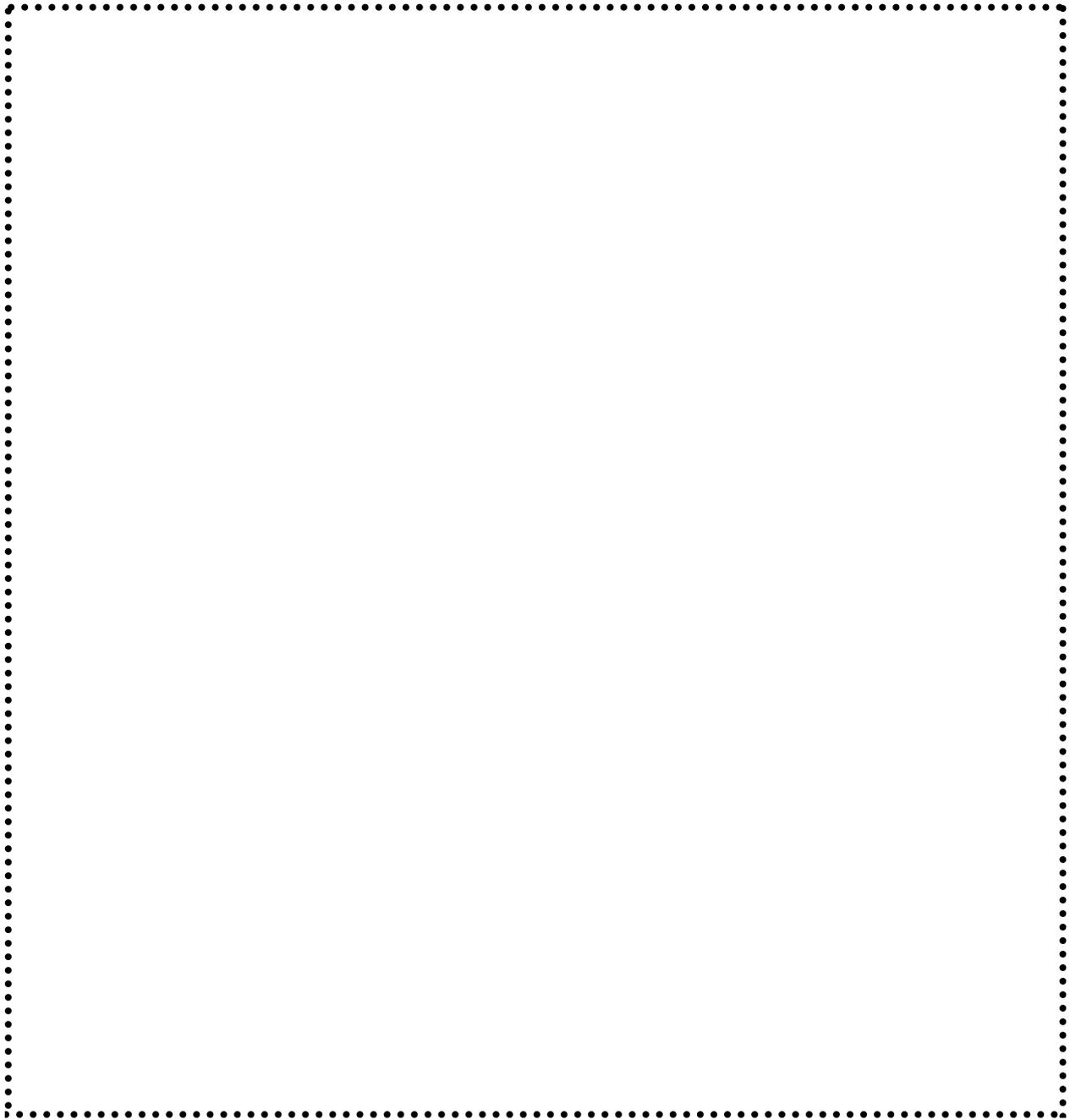
Use the space below to journal about the rhythms you see in your life and how they affect you:



This week I commit to:



Use this space to consider new rhythms you could benefit from and how they might help you live to the fullest:



Additional Understanding: During the week, ask a variety of people about what they do to rest and relax. Ask people you respect or who seem to have it “together”. If you have time, talk to them about their routines and how they balance work and play. Think about their answers and how you might include some of their practices in your own life.

Opportunity is missed by most because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. ~Thomas Edison

*Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.
(Exodus 20:9,10)*

Earlier in this unit we already started the discussion regarding our need to realize that God is in control. In the earlier context we talked about our tendency to overwork, indicating our belief that God needed our help.

Now we need to talk about the reverse. We need to consider our tendencies to be lazy and put in less time and energy than we should. We need to think about the areas in our lives where we don't give our all, or end up giving just whatever is left over.

Ironically, most of us have both tendencies. We tend to overwork when we should be resting, and we tend to sit around doing nothing when we should be up on our feet getting things done.

Figuring out which situation we are in —overworking or over-resting— is often difficult for us. We sometimes feel that our work demands too much of us, but feel lazy if we take vacation or ask our supervisors for a lighter load. When we spend an entire day just laughing with our families or playing games with friends we sometimes feel guilty that we didn't get much work done.

That is one of many reasons why God designated one day a week as a Sabbath rest day.

Often times, Christian churches and other groups emphasize the spiritual significance of Sabbath. And it is true that observing Sabbath can, and should, be a spiritual experience. But the giving of Sabbath also has a very practical, earthly purpose. The practice of Sabbath gives us a model for rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation.

Most of us don't celebrate a true Sabbath. We have many things required of us at all times during our weeks. Which is unfortunate. When we don't give ourselves that full day of rest and recuperation from our work-week, we must find ways to fit that rest time into the crevices that exist throughout the rest of our week.

And this is where we get confused about when we should be working and when we should be resting.

When we realize the importance of Sabbath for both our spiritual wellbeing and our physical wellbeing, the task now becomes learning how to re-orient our lives to allow for a full day of rest. For most of us this will be a difficult and long challenge of choosing priorities and changing habits, but we will find that Sabbath is truly beneficial to living the balance between work and rest.

God's Gifts: Work

"I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God."

~Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

Consider this statement: Our work should not determine our value or identity.

When someone says "Tell me about yourself", what do you say? If you are like most Americans, your response looks something like this:

Well, I'm a stay-at-home mother of four (you then proceed to name them all and what they are like).

OR

Well, I work for [pick random company]. I have been happily married for 11 years, and have two amazing children (you then proceed to name them and what they are like).

When people ask you this question, what is your typical response?

Isn't it interesting that in almost every case, we don't actually answer the question of "Who are you?"

When we are asked to tell people about ourselves, we tell people about the people in our lives, the work we do, and a variety of other pieces of our lives that say very little about who we actually are.

Human identity is the most fragile thing that we have, and it's often only found in moments of truth.

~Alan Rudolph

Now, the people in our lives do say something about who we are. The job we have chosen does say a lot about our personality and our values. But there is much more to who we are as human beings than that.

Consider this statement:

John recently moved to a new small town, currently lives alone, and works for a large local company.

All of those statements are true. They are all small pieces of who John is, but none of them really says very much about his personality, values, or desires. Yet it is the statement we often offer in response to people who ask us about who we are.

Why do we answer that way?

Often times, we don't have a better answer to offer. We spend so much of our time and energy dedicated to work and family that we haven't taken the time to find out who we really are. We don't really know what makes us tick. We know what things frustrate us, but we haven't really considered why. We know what relaxes us (some of the time), but we aren't sure why it works, or often even why we need to relax. We know what jobs we enjoy, but we only scratch the surface as to what pieces of the job appeal to us.

And since we don't know who we really are, we allow things outside ourselves to define us and determine our value. Instead of looking within ourselves and to our Creator for identity, we count on others to provide that for us.

But people aren't perfect, and so our identity and value are often put into jeopardy.

A friendship disintegrates, a marriage ends, we lose our job ... the list continues. In each of these unfortunate situations, our identity is questioned. If we put our value in our job and it ends, where is our value then? If we find our identity in our friendships, and we lose a meaningful one, then who are we after that?

This is one of the reasons it is so important that we realize our jobs should not be the place where we place our value or identity. Jobs change, they end, and sometimes they turn sour. We need to resist the temptation to identify too closely with our work. We need to remember that who we are is based in our personality, our morals, our dreams, our desires, and our God. Our identity is entirely determined internally. Nothing outside ourselves and our God should be allowed to affect that.

Human identity is the most fragile thing that we have, and it's often only found in moments of truth.

~Alan Rudolph

After considering all the ways we side-step the question that asks who we are, take this opportunity to carefully respond to the statement: Tell me about yourself.

A large, empty rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for a response.

This week I commit to:

Human identity is the most fragile thing that we have, and it's often only found in moments of truth.
~Alan Rudolph

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

~Luke 10:40,41

Read Luke 10: 38-42

This story can be frustrating on the surface.

Many sermons, studies, and books about this passage describe Martha as someone who is so caught up in her work that she ignored the fact that Jesus himself was sitting in her house. She is seen as a workaholic who tries to get Mary in trouble for not helping with all the work.

Mary is described as the woman who put aside everything that needed to be done and chose to sit at Jesus' feet. She is often portrayed as the person in the "right" because she chose to be with Jesus, while Martha didn't.

But there is more to this story than that.

Martha is busy and frustrated, and look at what Jesus says to her, "You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one." Martha is not being scolded for working. She is not being scolded for taking time to prepare. Martha is being scolded for being so caught up in her work that she has failed to recognize that something more inherently valuable is available to her.

Martha is being scolded for placing too much of her value in her work.

She thinks Jesus will value her only if she completes all the preparations well. Martha thinks she is as valuable to Jesus as she is useful to him. But she has it all wrong. And Mary has it right.

Mary isn't lazy, Mary isn't trying to give Martha more work to do. Mary simply recognizes that her identity is in Jesus Christ himself, and as long as she is able to be with him she will be.

Mary is praised because she knows where her identity belongs, and acts accordingly.

When we read the story as one valuing identity, it is a lot less frustrating. It is no longer condemning the idea of placing value in work; it is condemning the idea of placing *our* value in work.

So where are you placing your identity? Are you like Martha, who believed she was only as good as she was useful? Or are you Mary, who knew that her value was completely based on her identity as a child of God?

Additional Understanding: Read the following passages and consider their implications about identity.

Matthew 19: 16-30

Galatians 3:26-29

Daniel 3

1 Samuel 8

1 Kings 11:1-8

Judges 16:4-22

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~Alan Rudolph