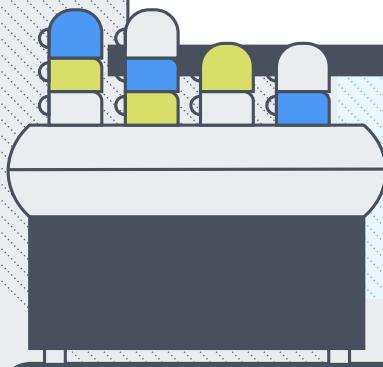


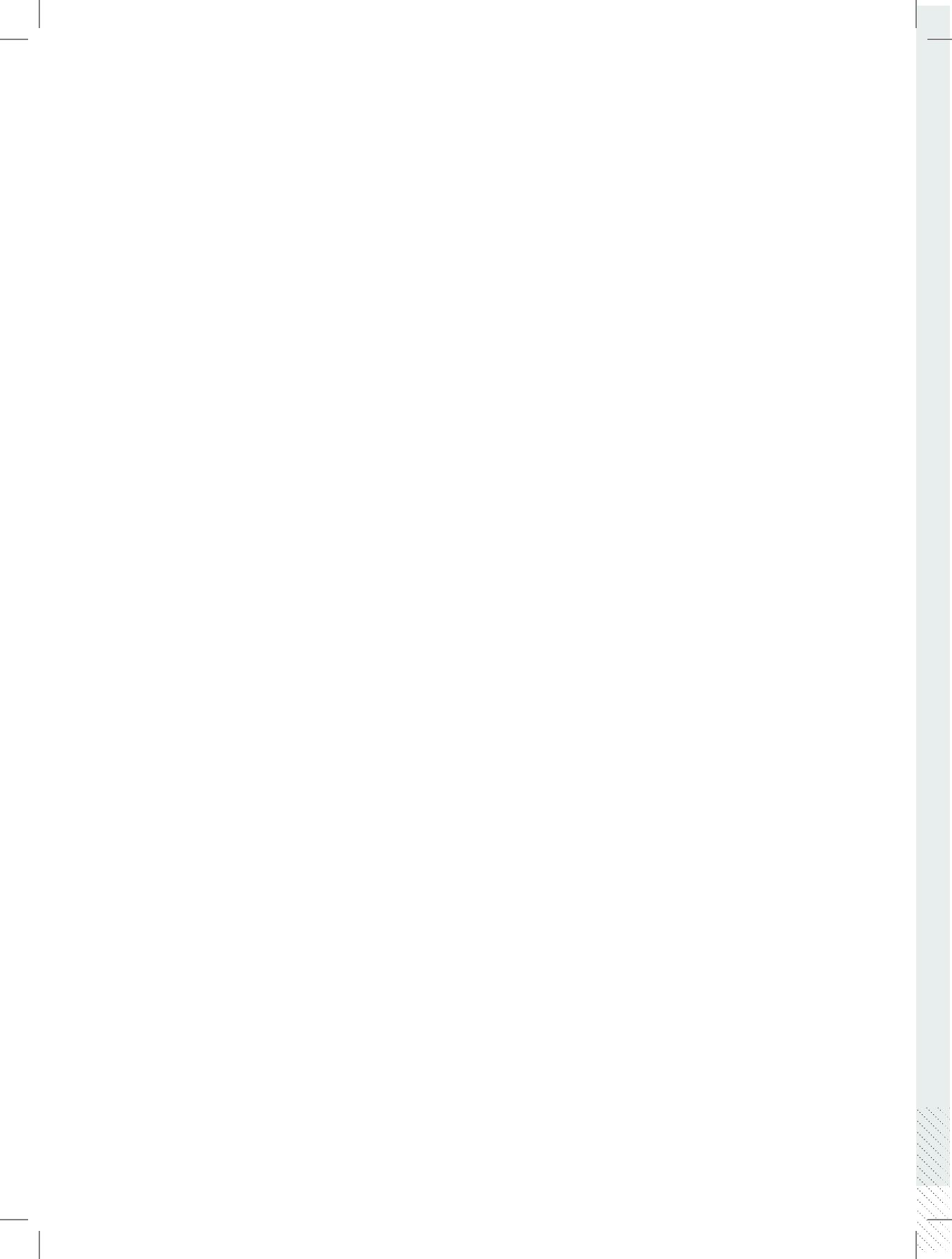
LIVING

A

SMALL

LIFE



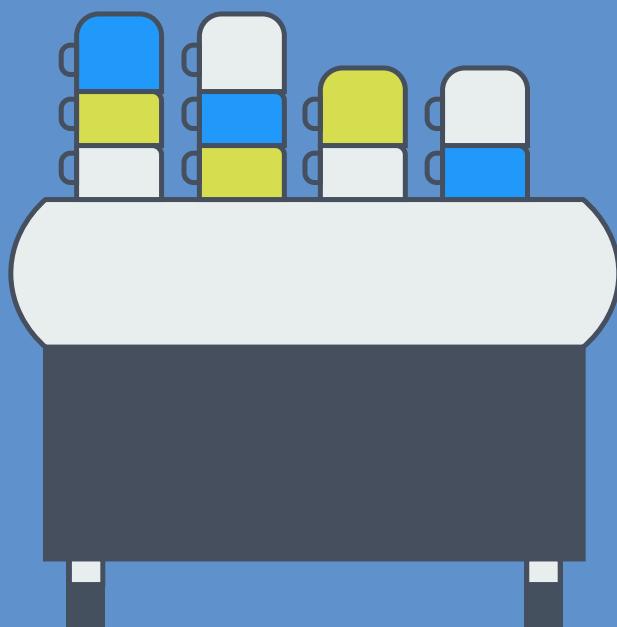


INTRODUCTION

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that all of life is a gift from God—both the good and the hard things. So why is it so difficult for us to find contentment in this life? We often find ourselves striving to achieve the unachievable and worrying about things we will never be able to control. So why do we continually pursue what we know will end up leaving us empty? Relationships, friendships, perfect grades, successful careers, being the best athlete, and popularity. Placing our hope in these things is nothing but meaningless.

Throughout this study, we will navigate the tension between the meaninglessness of life and God's good gift of enjoying life. As we seek to find meaning and value, Scripture tells us the best thing we can do is fear the Lord and obey his commands. We will look at our attitudes towards work, how we view ourselves, and the way we interact with other believers. Living a small life is not easy—it requires self-discipline to humble yourself and live in hope that God will one day make all things right.

WEEK 1



A SMALL LIFE

"HERE NOW IS MY FINAL CONCLUSION: FEAR GOD AND
OBEY HIS COMMANDS, FOR THIS IS EVERYONE'S DUTY."

-ECCLESIASTES 12:13

HUMILITY

Do you believe you can create a good life for yourself apart from God? What would that life look like? The answers to these questions reveal what you believe will give you hope and purpose here on earth.

As we study Ecclesiastes this week, we will learn that our greatest hope is not in this world, but in a future one. When we lay down what is most important to us and choose to follow God fully, we understand our place in the creation story—we are the created ones, designed to live in obedience to our Creator, God. This foundational principle of our faith is challenging. Living it out requires a posture of humility. To truly walk with God, we must submit to his authority, obey his commands, and put our desires aside to follow him. To live as created beings, we must understand that we are limited, with no control over the circumstances we face in life. What does it look like to live in that tension?

We can flourish when “Living a Small Life.” When we humble ourselves before the Lord as his servants, we begin to find true life. First, we have to acknowledge that life is not about our personal gain and fulfillment. Instead, we have a role to play in the family of God. True purpose and meaning comes only from our identity as God’s children.

In Ecclesiastes 1, Solomon, the writer, introduces the idea that everything under the sun is “hevel,” meaning it’s all meaningless, fleeting, and unpredictable. Whatever, or whom-ever, we try to make the center of our world here on earth will always fall short of our expectations and will only lead us to experience great loss. There is no doubt that we all have seen or experienced the brokenness of the world and have felt the emptiness that it leaves us with. The writer will draw you to a place where you understand that nothing is solid outside of God, our Creator.

"BUT AS I LOOKED AT EVERYTHING I HAD WORKED SO HARD TO ACCOMPLISH, IT WAS ALL SO MEANINGLESS—LIKE CHASING THE WIND. THERE WAS NOTHING REALLY WORTHWHILE ANYWHERE."

—ECCLESIASTES 2:11

 **Read Ecclesiastes 2:1–11.**

As you read, write down a list of things that the writer refers to as meaningless.

Out of the list, what are you tempted to believe will fulfill you? Why?

In what area of your life do you need to take a posture of humility? What do you need to submit to God and trust him to take care of?

A BETTER HOPE

If someone asked you what is most important in your life, what would you say? We all assign value to the things of this life, whether it's a relationship, your future dreams, a sport you play, or something else. We naturally orient our lives around these things, putting our time, money, and energy towards what we care most about.

In today's passage, Solomon explores the idea that we have to abandon the fleeting, unstable things of this world in order to hold onto something better. 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that this world and everything in it will pass away, even our earthly bodies. Our physical world is filled with brokenness and despair. When you read the passage from Ecclesiastes today, you will be challenged to consider how much value you place in this world.

Friendships, dreams of the future, wealth, and work are not usually bad by themselves, but when we start putting all of our hope in them, they fall short and ultimately fail us. People can bring us joy, but they cannot bring us life. Playing well in a game or making good grades can be celebrated, but they cannot bring you real value. Plans after graduation can be exciting, but they will not fulfill your dreams. None of these things satisfy our deepest longings—they only leave us disappointed and wanting more when they fall short.

Hope creates a sense of purpose and motivation. As believers, we are invited into a new and better hope, one that is based solely on Jesus, not on this world. This hope is sturdy and does not leave us disappointed. We look forward to eternity with Jesus with joy and expectation that he will make all things new. Our hope is that we will not live in these fragile bodies in a broken world forever, one day we will be made whole because of what Christ did for us on the cross. This kind of hope has promise, it does not fail us, and it gives us purpose to live for everyday of our lives here on earth.

This world can be enjoyed—relationships, eating good food, playing sports, traveling the world, and working can bring us joy because we are not putting all of our hope in them fulfilling us. Our hope is set on something much greater than anything this world offers. The good things of this world point us back to worship and praise of our Creator.

*PEOPLE CAN BRING US JOY,
BUT THEY CANNOT BRING US LIFE.*

 **Read Ecclesiastes 9:1–10.**

Where have you been placing your hope outside of Jesus?

How have these things failed you or left you feeling unsatisfied?

For seniors—what hopes or values have you been tempted to put in the next season of life after graduation?

REJOICING IN TODAY

Today, we will explore the freedom that comes when we enjoy God's blessings without depending on them to fulfill us. We then begin to worship the Creator instead of the creation.

When God created us, he gave us the capacity to delight in him and the world he created. It's important to understand that delighting in this world directs our worship back to God. Remembering who God is, the Creator and King, allows us to keep good things from becoming idols in our lives. Ultimately, God is the source from which all blessings come, and we are not in control of our lives.

Psalm 118:24 says "This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." When you woke up this morning, how did you view your day? Was that your first thought? Did you have joy, or were your thoughts filled with anxieties for the day to come or maybe even regrets from the days and weeks before?

A huge part of rejoicing in today is allowing yourself to be fully present each day. When our minds are only focused on what is to come or what we have already done, there's no time to think about today. As created beings, we are confined to the present moment. There's no going back, and all we can do is wait for the future to come. But God, our Creator, is not restricted by time. He exists outside of time and controls all of time.

We don't have to worry about what is to come because we can trust that he goes before us. He will guide and protect our steps, even on the bad days. Rejoicing in today does not mean we ignore the hard things that come our way. As believers, we do not have to live in fear of the future because we know God will be there and he is faithful.

In today's passage, the writer tells us that since we are really not in control, then there is nothing better than for us to be joyful, do good, and enjoy the simple things of life as gifts from God.

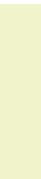
THERE IS NOTHING BETTER THAN FOR US TO BE JOYFUL, DO GOOD, AND ENJOY THE SIMPLE THINGS OF LIFE AS GIFTS FROM GOD.

 **Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–15 and Ecclesiastes 11:8–9.**

What anxious thoughts fill your mind most often?

Is it difficult for you to enjoy today? If so, how come?

What parts of your future do you find most difficult to entrust to God?

 Spend a minute writing down several blessings that the Lord has given you. Often, writing these things down helps us remember how blessed we really are and we become less focused on what we don't have.

FEAR GOD AND OBEY HIS COMMANDS

The writer of Ecclesiastes ends the book by saying “Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone’s duty” (12:13b). Throughout Scripture, God calls his people to fear him **and** obey his commands. The two ideas go hand in hand.

1 Samuel 12:24 says, “But be sure to fear the Lord and faithfully serve him.”

Deuteronomy 10:12 says, “What does the Lord require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul.”

If this is such a big deal, then what does it mean to fear God? How is obedience intertwined with the fear of God?

Fearing God is much more than just having a healthy respect for him—it involves acknowledging how powerful, mighty, and glorious he is. Yes, he is a merciful and loving God, but he is also a just God who disciplines his children and punishes those who disobey him. To fear God is to affirm that he is the ultimate power. 1 Chronicles 29:11 says “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom.”

Our Creator rules over all the Heavens and the Earth. He has control over anything we are afraid of. He has already conquered death, and believers get to live in the freedom that death no longer is the end result for us. Fearing God also means you don’t need to control every outcome and circumstance because you trust that he is ultimately in control of **all** things.

Once we begin to understand what it means to fear God, obedience naturally follows. A life of obedience makes sense when we view God as the sovereign, powerful Creator who at the end of time will be the ultimate Judge, bringing justice for all right and wrong doing. If that’s your view of God, you begin to understand that there is greater loss in disobeying God’s commands than there is in saying no to our sinful desires.

The writer of Ecclesiastes wants us to understand that we only have one shot at the time we have been given, and if everything under the sun is meaningless and temporary, then the best thing we can do is fear God and live obediently. He is calling us to be faithful with what we have today.

A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE MAKES SENSE WHEN WE
VIEW GOD AS THE SOVEREIGN, POWERFUL CREATOR.

 **Read Ecclesiastes 12:8–14.**

Fearing God is a big idea that believers often struggle to grasp.
In what ways is it difficult for you to understand? What questions do you have?

Next step: Take these questions to a parent, leader, or staff member so you can better understand what this looks like in your life.

Where in your life do you need to start choosing obedience?

What does it look like for you to be faithful in your season of life?

NOTES



WEEK 2





WORK

"SO WHETHER YOU EAT OR DRINK, OR WHATEVER YOU DO,
DO IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD."

-1 CORINTHIANS 10:30

THE CREATION OF WORK

When you think of “work,” what comes to mind? Is it a specific career or dream job? Or do you think about your current job? Work carries different weight for different people in different seasons of life.

Scripture tells us that we were created to work. That means that even as a high schooler, you have a responsibility to work. Every day, work is all around you—school, part time jobs, babysitting, serving in church, and even chores at home. It’s natural to feel burdened by some of the work that we are responsible for, but God has called us to be faithful with what he puts in front of us in different seasons of our lives.

God himself worked as he created the Heavens and the Earth over the course of six days. Afterwards, he looked over what he made and said it was **good**. Then, after that hard work, he rested on the seventh day (Genesis 1). He also gave mankind the ability and responsibility to work. The Creator gave the creation the ability to produce, build, and create. How cool is that?

God placed Adam in the garden to tend and watch over it. God also gave Adam the opportunity to name all the living creatures. Adam was given a specific job—to care for and tend to God’s world in a unique way.

We have work to do as well. Throughout this week, we will look at these big ideas:

- Work isn’t always easy.
- Work can be fruitful, and is a gift God has given us.
- What work are you responsible for?

Each of these topics will help you understand the origin of work, identify tension you may feel with the work God has called you to, what blessings come from working, and what your responsibility is in your season of life.

God has designed work as an essential part of living on Earth and said that it is a good thing for us. As our Creator, he has given our work purpose and value. Are you willing to trust and believe God in his design for work?

*THE CREATOR GAVE THE CREATION THE
ABILITY TO PRODUCE, BUILD, AND CREATE.*

 **Read Genesis 1–2.**

What stands out to you about the creation story?

What kind of work do you enjoy? What work do you dislike? Why?

After working hard, what is your idea of rest? What helps you restore energy?

How does knowing that God sees work as a good thing change how you view work?

WORK IN A FALLEN WORLD

In Genesis 3, sin entered the world. All of creation experienced death in unique ways, and our work became cursed too. We have all felt the brokenness of work at some point. A job needs to be accomplished, and no matter how hard you try, nothing seems to go your way. Tools break, people are unpredictable, technology has a mind of its own, and no matter what you do, it feels impossible to do the job right. Does that sound familiar at all?

Two things are true in our world—God still believes that work and responsibility are good things, but there is brokenness and difficulty in our work. We tend to react to this tension in one of two ways. Some of us will be tempted to be lazy and shun responsibility because of the energy work requires. Others will be tempted to work so hard that their identity comes from the approval of doing a job well.

Those who tend to be lazy often strive for comfort. They will avoid hard and painful responsibility at all costs and find themselves in cycles of procrastination and underperforming. This group is going to be tempted to hide and prefer to do the bare minimum.

Those who tend to over-identify with work are fueled by affirmation. This group will start to misplace who they are with what they do—their identity is the work. When work doesn't go well, they are devastated and fear what people think about them. Perfection will be the goal and nothing less than that is accepted.

You may find yourself somewhere in between those two extremes in different seasons of your life or depending on the task at hand. The goal is not to find a perfect balance, but instead to see work for what it really is. We were given a responsibility to take care of the world around us and to use work as a way to provide for ourselves and others. Work also creates structure and purpose for our lives in a way that can keep us from trouble.

While you are young, there is more room for you to fail and learn from your mistakes. Your responsibility is lower than it will ever be, which gives you the opportunity to do hard things without the same consequences that come later in life. This is an important season for you to learn that your identity is not wrapped up in the work that you do, but instead we can trust God and have peace as we do the work he puts before us.

WE WERE GIVEN A RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE CARE OF THE WORLD AROUND US AND TO USE WORK AS A WAY TO PROVIDE FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS.

 **Read Ecclesiastes 2:18–26 and then 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13.**

What does “work” look like in your season of life?

If you find this question hard to answer, talk to a parent or small group leader. Have someone help you think through what responsibilities you need to be taking care of. Most likely, you will have multiple answers for this question.

What is most difficult for you when it comes to work?

Do you lean more towards laziness or over-identifying with work?

In what way have you seen the brokenness of the world affect your work?

WORK WAS GIVEN TO US AS A GIFT

We've learned that God created work, declared it good, and that he's given us specific work to do. We've seen that work can be difficult and requires a lot of time and attention. Today, we'll look at work as a gift and start identifying what we are responsible for.

Ecclesiastes 3 says it is wise to enjoy what is in front of you—work, people, and your season. What is in front of you currently? Do you enjoy the life God has given you?

Think about your family, friends, small group, and extracurricular activities. God has given you opportunities to be in relationship with all of these people and use or gain skills in these activities. It takes work to cultivate those relationships and hone those skills so we can bless those around us.

School is also a type of work that can be used as a gift. Have you ever thought about school in this way? No matter where you attend school, you can build friendships with people around you whom you might not typically be friends with, invite them to church or Forge, or enjoy a meal with them. This is a type of relational work that benefits others through love and kindness. You may end up with a new friend too!

God calls us to provide for others through our work, ultimately blessing them. However, we can't provide for others if we aren't first providing for ourselves. Work involves more than making money. You can start learning how to work and be responsible for yourself from a young age. Even toddlers can learn to pick up their toys! These small tasks lead to cutting the grass, doing the dishes, babysitting, or having a part-time job while still in school.

How are you being responsible for yourself in this season? Are you doing your own laundry? If you drive, do you have a job to help pay for your gas and car insurance? These are ways you can start providing for yourself now in high school which is a gift to you, your parents, and can be to others as well. Learning about responsibility and the gift of work is valuable as you begin taking on more tasks in each season. Talk with your parents about their ideas on what works best for your family. Once you start being responsible for yourself, you can move towards using your work as a gift to others.

We have an opportunity to provide for others through the work we do. In fact, God wants us to care for the vulnerable. This looks different depending on your season, and it will change throughout your life as well. As a high schooler, you do have work to do, and God can use your efforts to bless others.

*"SO I SAW THAT THERE IS NOTHING BETTER
FOR PEOPLE THAN TO BE HAPPY IN THEIR WORK."
—ECCLESIASTES 3:22*

 **Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–15, Ecclesiastes 5, and 1 Corinthians 10:31.**

How is your work a gift to you?

How is the work you're doing benefiting others?

What is one responsibility you can take on at home that you aren't doing currently?



WHAT ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR?

In the movie *Frozen II*, Anna says you need to “do the next right thing.” (If you don’t know this reference, definitely look it up!) It can be tempting to jump ahead; however, we need to take the next right step. God commands us not to worry about anything, but rather pray about everything (Philippians 4:6). Often, we worry about things that are our concern instead of our responsibility. A responsibility is something we must do and have control over. Concerns include things that we cannot control and are not ultimately responsible for.

We have a responsibility to work. Practically, we must work to provide for ourselves—life is expensive. You may be financially responsible for some things now, and if you’re not, it’s coming. Rent, electricity, food, fun events—all of these things require money, and you must carry your weight. How can you shoulder that responsibility? You must get good enough at something to make enough money to live in this world. This requires skill, time, attention, and energy. In order to learn what you’re good at, you must start somewhere. The more you serve, work, and are involved in different things, the more you’ll learn about how God has wired you and what gifts he’s given you. Your community around you will affirm your God-given talents and gifts as you continue to exert yourself in many different types of work. As you learn more about what you’re good at, you’ll have opportunities not only to provide for yourself, but also for people around you.

God doesn’t reveal to us all we’ll do in our lives in one moment. We actually couldn’t handle it. This is evident in many stories in Scripture, some of which we will look at next week. You must start to identify what you are responsible for in your current season. Everyone has a different story, so don’t compare yourself to your friend, small group leader, or anyone else. Take a look at your specific situation—your background, if you have a job, if you drive, if you play sports or another activity. What are you trying to own that isn’t your responsibility? Or, are you neglecting something that is your responsibility? God calls us to be faithful with what’s right in front of us. We can trust and rest in the fact that he will prepare us for the future.

*GOD CALLS US TO BE FAITHFUL WITH
WHAT'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.*

 **Read Philippians 4:6–9.**

Based on this passage, what are you worried about or trying to control that is not your responsibility?

Do you lean towards putting off work or gaining approval or achievement through work?

How are you tempted to think about the future instead of focusing on and enjoying what's right in front of you now?

NOTES

Week 2 Teachings:



WEEK 3



OBSCURITY

"FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON,
A TIME FOR EVERY ACTIVITY UNDER HEAVEN."

-ECCLESIASTES 3:1

LIFE IN OBSCURITY

When you think of the word “obscurity,” what comes to mind? Grab a dictionary or google the word “obscurity.” What do you find?

If something is obscure, it is not clearly seen or distinguished. With that definition in mind, consider the way that you live on a daily basis. Do you ever feel like your life is obscure?

You may not realize it yet; however, our lives have so much obscurity in them. Most of our lives are not going to be in the spotlight. The reality is, life is not about us or what we can accomplish. We may have a dream or expectation that things will turn out a certain way but then something goes wrong and not according to plan and all of sudden we feel out of control and left feeling confused.

Have you felt like this before? How did things work out?

Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that there is a time and season for everything. There are specific moments when God allows you to experience different things—both good and challenging. What is important for us to remember is that God knows exactly what is going to happen, when it will happen, and how it will all play out. Even in uncertainty, believers are called to trust him in all situations. We all have to answer the question—am I going to trust myself, or can I trust God to be in control of every season of my life?

This week, we will look at three people in Scripture to help us understand how obscurity is a part of the life of a believer. These people show us what it looks like to follow and trust God on a daily basis as they continue to do the next thing in front of them. They had no idea what was in store for them; however, God used their unique circumstances to display his glory.

The challenge for us is to trust that God will shape our lives in his timing and according to his plan. We must learn what it looks like to be content and faithful in each moment given to us.

*EVEN IN UNCERTAINTY, BELIEVERS ARE
CALLED TO TRUST HIM IN ALL SITUATIONS.*

 **Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.**

What does the author tell us about life in these verses?

What feels unclear or uncertain to you right now in your season of life?

Have you told anyone about what you're feeling or thinking? If not, write down who you will talk with and when.

What still seems confusing to you about the idea of obscurity?



OBEDIENCE IN SMALL THINGS

From a young age, David was consistent in the work that was put before him. As the shepherd in his family, he tended to the flock every day. This was not a glamorous job. It consisted of long, hard days caring for stinky, unintelligent animals. Yet, even in this obscure job, he was obedient in the role his father gave him.

Not only was David obedient, but he was willing to risk his life for the sake of his sheep. As wild animals came, he learned how to kill them—anything from wolves to bears. He did what was necessary to protect the sheep and did not view the work as a waste of his time.

David was faithful in shepherding the sheep without knowing that one day, he would be given a greater responsibility, to kill Goliath. By the time he stood in front of Goliath, David stood with confidence knowing that God had provided and protected him before, so why would he not do it again? That confidence did not happen overnight though—it was developed over years of David being obedient as a shepherd boy to his father's flock. He was faithful with small things over time, which prepared him to be faithful when he was facing a giant.

In Luke 16:10, Jesus says: “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities.”

It's also important to remember that David was assigned the task of shepherd boy with no promise of a greater life, and he was seemingly okay with that. Often, we become motivated by the potential for future success. The promised reward drives our hard work. David, however, was promised nothing. He was content to work in obscurity and be faithful on a daily basis in the field with those sheep.

Even after being anointed as king, there was a long period of time when David had to continue to be faithful and wait patiently until he could take on his new position as King of Israel. He wasn't perfect, and throughout his time as king, David committed some pretty terrible sins. And yet, he is still referred to as a “man after God’s own heart.” Even in his brokenness, David lived a life of faithfulness, continually walking in repentance and eventually obedience to the work the Lord called him to.

"IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL IN LITTLE THINGS, YOU WILL BE FAITHFUL IN LARGE ONES. BUT IF YOU ARE DISHONEST IN LITTLE THINGS, YOU WON'T BE HONEST WITH GREATER RESPONSIBILITIES."

—LUKE 16:10

 **Read 1 Samuel 16:1–13, 17:32–37, and 41-51.**

What does 1 Samuel 16:1–13 tell us about how God judges humans? What does this teach us about God?

 **Now, read Psalm 51.**

Psalm 51 shows us a prayer of repentance from David. This Psalm can help us in repentance. Read the Psalm and write your own prayer of repentance below.

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OBEDIENCE IN SUFFERING

In Acts 9, we read the story of a man who was leading the charge in persecuting the church. He was eager to kill the Lord's followers whenever he could. As he was on his way to Damascus, a bright light overwhelmed him and Jesus appeared, commanding him to stop persecuting his people. Through a series of events, Saul becomes Paul (Acts 13), gets baptized, begins preaching the gospel to churches, and will go on to write over half of the New Testament. The man who was once killing believers goes on to live a life preaching the gospel to the same churches he was persecuting.

Paul's story starts out with more drama than David's story. He enters the scene with a terrible reputation. Immediately, Jesus directs Saul (Paul) to go find a man named Ananias. Acts 9 tells us that the last thing Ananias wants to do is interact with this man who had done horrific things, but that the Lord responds, saying, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to the kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

So not only do we see a crazy conversion, but we also see that the Lord is clear that Paul's life is going to be impactful, but it will not be free from suffering. Throughout Paul's missionary journeys, the Jews would plot to kill him, he was imprisoned on several occasions, he faced many difficult relationships, not to mention he had to live with the burden of his past (he once murdered the people he was now trying to bring salvation to). In no way did this man live a glamorous life. In a few of Paul's letters, he even mentions how it was a struggle to get people to even pay attention to the words he was saying (2 Corinthians 11:5-6).

From imprisonment, Paul wrote four different letters which would later become four books of the Bible. He did not let his difficult circumstances keep him from preaching the gospel, encouraging believers, mentoring other young teachers, and warning churches about false teachers. Interestingly, Paul didn't need the spotlight to be obedient to what God called him to do—he needed pen, paper, and someone willing to deliver a letter to a church. Even now, hundreds of years later, we benefit from the words that a broken, sinful man was able to write because of the redemptive work of Christ in his life.

WE BENEFIT FROM THE WORDS THAT A BROKEN, SINFUL MAN WAS ABLE TO WRITE BECAUSE OF THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST IN HIS LIFE.

Before you read Scripture today and answer the response questions, consider this— are you willing to suffer for the sake of growing God's Kingdom even if it means you may suffer and never see a reward on this side of Heaven?

 **Read 1 Peter 1:12–19.**

How does this passage tell us we should view suffering?

How was Paul's life an obscure one?

What can we learn from Paul's story about what it means to suffer for the sake of the gospel?



OBEDIENCE IN HARD WORK

The last character we will look at who lived a life of obscurity is Ruth. If you've never read the story of Ruth, take some time to read this short but powerful story about how God invites broken but obedient people to be a part of his family. After Ruth's husband died, Ruth no longer had an obligation to her mother-in-law, who actually insisted that Ruth return to her family and find a new husband. However, Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi and return to the land of Judah. In chapter 1 we see Ruth's famous words showing her commitment:

"Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"—Ruth 1:16–17

It's important to understand that Ruth did not grow up knowing who God was. She grew up in a pagan nation that worshiped other gods. When she made the decision to stay with Naomi, she was also making the decision to choose God over the life that she grew up in. Ruth would be moving to a foreign country, how intimidating and scary!

In their new home, Ruth and Naomi did not have husbands to take care of them. If they wanted to eat and survive, Ruth was going to have to figure it out. Ruth had to humble herself and be content with gathering leftover harvest from a field that was owned by Boaz, a relative of her late father-in-law. She didn't take her responsibility lightly. Ruth was obedient and faithful, willing to get her hands dirty and sweat for the sake of providing for her mother-in-law.

Boaz noticed Ruth's hard work and kindness. What began as a story of obedience in obscurity turns into a beautiful story of redemption and hope for Ruth. In the end, Boaz and Ruth marry and give birth to a son. A story that seemed sad, obscure, and hopeless was turned around because of a woman's willingness to follow God and be obedient to the work he put before her.

The work we do may not be glamorous. Like Ruth, we may be required to work for leftovers and exert ourselves for small payouts. What's powerful about Ruth's story is that God honors her obedience, hard work, and faithfulness. Ruth will eventually become the great-grandmother to King David, whose descendants include Jesus. Ruth's obedience put her in the family tree of the Savior of the World! Her seemingly obscure life was actually a pivotal part of God's Redemption Plan.

Being faithful and content with the work God calls us to on a daily basis is challenging. It requires us to work hard and be okay with seemingly small outcomes. Are we okay being obedient for the sake of being obedient, not for the sake of gaining a great reward?

*WHAT BEGAN AS A STORY OF OBEDIENCE IN OBSCURITY
TURNS INTO A BEAUTIFUL STORY OF REDEMPTION AND
HOPE FOR RUTH.*

 **Read Ruth 2.**

How does God protect and provide for Ruth?

In what circumstances do you find it hard to be obedient (to God, your parents, authority)?

In what ways do you need to be faithful today even in seemingly small tasks?

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WEEK 4



COMMUNITY

"MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP YOURSELVES UNITED IN
THE SPIRIT, BINDING YOURSELVES TOGETHER WITH PEACE."

-EPHESIANS 4:3

WE WERE CREATED TO LIVE WITH OTHERS

Since the beginning of time, God created us to live with others. Genesis 3:18 says, “it is not good for man to be alone.” Adam, as an individual man, was lacking because of his isolation. God saw fit to bring along a woman to join Adam as his wife, for them to be fruitful and multiply, and for the earth to be filled with more people. Then, in Genesis 3, sin entered the world, relationships became fractured, and perfect communion with God and one another was broken.

All throughout Scriptures, we see the tension of that brokenness unfold. Death enters in, people harm one another, they reject each other, and what began as a gift from God becomes a burden we have to learn how to manage. All that to say, relationships are hard. Living in a broken world where sin exists does not set us up well for being in close relation to other human beings. We were not created to live in a world where we experience relational hurt and brokenness.

Yet, God chooses to spread the good news of salvation through a body of believers. 1 Peter 2 refers to us as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s very own possession. Nothing about that implies living a life isolated from others. In order to be obedient and live on mission, we must learn to live in unity with other believers. It’s why Jesus says that loving one another is the second greatest commandment, equally important to loving God. He knows we are created for relationships and that they are valuable, but fruitful relationships require real effort. We all know from experience how difficult it can be to love others.

Part of living a small life is learning how to live with one another in our broken state. It’s why humility and obscurity are foundational ideas that we’ve discussed in past weeks. Until we realize that life is not about us, we are going to have a very hard time seeing how other people bring value to our lives.

As we focus on relationships this week, challenge yourself to really consider how the people you are doing life with have added value to your life. What relationships are life-giving for you? What relationships are challenging? How do you struggle to love others as Jesus commands?

UNTIL WE REALIZE THAT LIFE IS NOT ABOUT US, WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A VERY HARD TIME SEEING HOW OTHER PEOPLE BRING VALUE TO OUR LIVES.

 **Read Ecclesiastes 4:7–12 and Romans 12:3–16.**

Based on the passages above, why is it good not to live alone?

As believers, how are we to care for one another?

In what ways do you struggle to love others? Which specific people are hard for you to love?

WE NEED PEOPLE POURING IN

Hebrews 13:7 says “Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.”

Who comes to mind here? It could be your Forge leaders, Students staff, an older adult who has gone out of their way to invest in you, or maybe it's an older peer. Who in your life is investing time and energy to mentor you and pour into your life on a spiritual level?

In 1 Peter 5, Peter addresses a group of elders in the church as well as those who are younger and under their care. Within the church, God has appointed leaders as teachers and guides. There are certain roles in place for leadership, but not everyone who is a leader has an actual title. For example, your Forge leader most likely is not on staff at the church, but they still play an important role as a leader in your life. Peter explains that leadership is not to be taken lightly—it is a very serious role to play in the church.

In the same way, we should think about our role in being under the care of our leaders. To do so, we must humble ourselves and admit that we do not always know best. Often, our pride will deceive us into thinking that we do not need the care and instruction of others. The world tells us that we should just ignore or even shun anyone who disagrees with us. God's Word, however, instructs us to submit to authority, be willing to listen to those that are older and wiser, and find people who will lead by example. Our willingness to have people pouring into us spiritually reflects how committed we are to being a part of God's family.

Coming under leadership is not an easy thing to do. We do not like it when people speak hard truths to us. It is hard to listen to someone call us out when we make sinful choices. Accountability is important, but it requires us to be humble and recognize our need for others. You cannot expect yourself to be a strong believer in isolation.

*YOU CANNOT EXPECT YOURSELF TO
BE A STRONG BELIEVER IN ISOLATION.*

 **Read 1 Peter 5:1–11.**

How does Peter describe the role of a leader?

What does Peter say the role of a younger Christian should look like?

In what ways do you struggle to submit to spiritual authority?

WE NEED TO BE POURING OUT

In the same way spiritual mentorship is crucial to our faith, it is also important that we get in the game. The church was not created for us to just receive from; we all have a responsibility to carry weight. As believers, we have a role to play in the Kingdom of God. Galatians 6:2–3 tells us that sharing in each other’s burdens is a part of our roles. If at any point we think that we are too important to help those in need, we are just fooling ourselves. We are never too important to love and care for others.

We have talked every week about how important it is to be humble. If we really believe that Jesus is who he says he is, then we must follow his example—become a servant, put ourselves last. Jesus says that his people will be known by the way we love one another. All that is left is for us to obey that command.

For some of us, this looks like going to serve in an area like Grace Church Kids. Whether you serve in Big Group, in a classroom, or help prepare snacks for all the rooms—showing up, being consistent and reliable, and participating in what God is doing through the local church is how you can be obedient. For some of us, that looks like serving in middle school ministry and being more responsible for the discipleship of younger students. Maybe you are an upperclassmen and there are some freshmen students you can pursue a relationship with, invite them to join in on all that Forge has to offer, and eventually leave Forge better than when you came in your freshman year.

The focus is not necessarily on where you serve—it is on obeying the commands we have been given as believers. Serving and loving one another is an act of obedience. Being a part of the local church is something God calls us to do, and you saying yes is just walking in obedience.

Obedience requires humility and sacrifice. You will likely have to give something up in order to serve others. You may get less sleep on Sunday mornings or get home late on Sunday nights, you may have to spend your hard-earned money on a meal for someone else, or you may be asked to give more time and energy away than you’re comfortable with. All of these things could and probably will happen when you start giving your life away to further God’s Kingdom.

Serving and participating looks different for everyone, so we encourage you to talk to a leader or staff member. Ask how they think you can start serving or in what ways you might need to be carrying more responsibility.

JESUS SAYS THAT HIS PEOPLE WILL BE KNOWN BY THE WAY WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

 **Read Philippians 2:1–18.**

What would it look like to have an “attitude like Christ Jesus had”?

What sacrifices are hard for you to make when it comes to serving others?

Where do you need to take a step of obedience when it comes to serving?

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Today, begin by reading Ephesians 4:1–16.

According to these verses, what does it look like to be unified with other believers?

What do these verses tell us is at stake for us in being mature in our relationship with the Lord?

*"PATIENT ENDURANCE IS WHAT YOU NEED NOW,
SO THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO DO GOD'S WILL."
—HEBREWS 10:36A*

When we say yes to being an active participant in God's Kingdom, we get to be a part of something that is much greater than ourselves. Not only do we get to experience growth and maturity because of other believers, but we also get to be a source of growth for others. Ephesians 4:15 promises that when we act in love, we are actually moving one another towards being like Christ. Then, in verse 16, there is another promise of a body that is fruitful and growing because we are all participating in the work believers are called to do.

This is where our study, Living a Small Life, comes full circle. When we humble ourselves to live in fear of the Lord and obey his commands, we recognize that life is not about us, we submit ourselves to the work the Lord has for us, and we become active participants in the body of Christ. Then, we truly begin to understand what it means to live with our hope set on eternity.

Together, we can be a group of believers who are not bogged down by worry and anxiety about the future. With our hearts and minds set on Christ, we can be free from shame and regret. Success, knowledge, popularity, marriage, wealth—none of that has power over us. When we live our days focused on loving others and obeying God's commands, we find freedom.

Instead, we get to be a part of God's chosen people who are humble and gentle, patient with one another, loving each other through hardships and faults, and pursuing peace as a unified body. Let's read these final words from Hebrews 10:35–39 and be encouraged for the hope and joy that come from living a small, but faithful life.

So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. "For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away." But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.

What changes do you need to make in order to start living a small, more faithful life today?

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