

thrive



Week 15: Live!

How can we take the totality of our life experience up to this point and move forward in a manner that aligns with God's destiny for our lives? The lifestyle of protection caused us to hide from the very place God wanted to lead. What we had done for the purposes of self-preservation was in actuality depriving us from God's intention. Thus, in setting down that mentality, we are asked to live through God's guidance.

We accomplish God's will in our lives not by the way we perform or what we do, but by our ability to hear God's voice when He calls. It is a journey that requires overwhelming courage, unshakable trust and steadfast endurance. But above all, it requires intimacy.

Some of the pathways God leads go through valleys and dark caves. Some go through twisted pathways that seemingly obscure the vision for the future. God's leadership means faith overrides circumstances, and God's presence creates the security we crave in the midst of instability. Through intimacy we have the power we need to overcome, not in our own strength, but in His.

God created this idea of us before we were birthed, sat with us in our past experiences, redeemed us at the cross and prepares us to accomplish the destiny He has preordained for us in our future. He then prepares an eternal calling for us in Heaven, and stores up treasures and rewards that will validate our life experience.

Whatever story we brought in, it's God's story, and He isn't finished. There may have been pathways God didn't intend; but when it's all said and done, the ending can be redeemed. His providence, timing and indiscriminating redemptive capability can take what the enemy meant for evil, and use it for good.

Right now, God has placed dreams and ideas for our lives that many of us have not yet realized. Before you minimize, discount or simply say "it's impossible" – that dream that you've carried, that hope that flickers deep within "that there is more" may be the very reason you were created. In reality, there is no other "you" in this world, past, present or future. There is no replacement to who you will become. If you don't walk out your purpose, no one else can do it on your behalf.

As you seek to develop a life plan, there must be something far above a "to do" list that will motivate and summons you to not be a victim of circumstances, but a navigator of destiny, using God's strength and guidance. When you know where you've been, what has rooted you, who your God is, who you are in Him and where you are going, you become unstoppable. You become a living testimony and active participant in His perfect plan. From the deepest place of your heart, from the deepest craving in your being, you were designed for something more than whatever you are right now. That doesn't mean who you are is flawed or unacceptable. Rather, it means that God desires to grow you up in the fullness of your design.

WHAT I CAN'T CHANGE, WHAT I CAN CHANGE

As we go through life, we are faced with situations beyond our control. The truth is we can't force outcomes, and many times we are powerless. People violate us. Things get messy. We can't manipulate the external nature of our lives anymore than we can change the weather. There will be seasons of hardship and seasons of peace. God wants to secure and solidify our lives to prosper and grow despite outside conditions (see last week)

While there are elements in our lives that are unchangeable, there are things that God has authorized us to change. This includes our internal mindsets and behaviors, and most of all the choices we make day in and day out. In reality, all change is a choice. We often reject change because we are comfortable with the familiar. The fear of the unknown will trigger us to remain in the confinement of our own walls of bondage, and our sense of paralysis. Unknowingly, it can become easier to be a victim of circumstances than to navigate new roads through new choices.

Learning what we can and can't change is a major life principle. If we tend to think we can't change anything, we live a powerless life. If we think we have been authorized to change others or to do God's job, we become agents of control rather than bearers of love. This principle is the key message of the serenity prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

To take this principle into our lives, let's look at some different areas.

#1. We can't change people, but we can change ourselves in relationships.

We must understand we can't change people. We can't change their choices, nor can we in any way change their heart. We furthermore can't change their perspective or point of view, or assume that the filters they wear are something we are authorized to correct. Only God holds the key to accessing their heart at a change level.

Under any circumstances, and in any way, are we ever authorized to tell a person who they "should be," "ought to be," or how much of a failure they have become. We can express needs, we can state boundaries, but our position in their lives is to connect to them through love. Only God changes, only God heals, only God grows people. We simply are called to relate within the parameters of what the relationship warrants, and always be willing to operate by the honor God has designed for that relationship.

While we can't change people, we can walk out with boundaries and state our needs. We can learn to offer love, grace and hope, even when it's not being offered in return. We can change how we respond to people and we can always make healthy choices when a person is making unhealthy ones. We can choose to be victorious in our identity and position in Christ, and refuse to be victimized.

Being unable to change people means that all our relationship needs are left in God's hands; He will prompt us to change ourselves through God's provision. We change the way we respond to life, the way we frame situations and the offerings we make to people. But we can never change a person. We must accept where they are and honor the role they have in our lives. We honor people because we are honorable, not because they warrant it.

#2. We can't change people's demands; but we can change how we respond to them.

Each one of us is surrounded by people in our lives that have different functions. Some of those people we are related by birth – our families, mothers, fathers, etc. These people are part of our life, whether or not we choose. If we are married, we made a choice to bring that person into our life as a lifelong decision.

But apart from these permanently ordained roles, we have choices how we invest our time, resources and attention into relationships. And for those inner court relationships we have choices of how we allow people access.

In all our dealings, we have people that feed into us and help escalate us into purpose and meaning, and

people who have a negative influence and seem to detract us from living our design. Both these types of people have a purpose, and have been ordained by God. However, in our hearts, we'll have to set boundaries to deal with those that have a draining effect.

Just like any garden, if consumers came and ate the produce in the middle of the night, there would be nothing left to harvest. Just the same if we have people taking from us without balancing it off with people that are giving, the very work of yielding fruit can be lost. Healthy relationships are designed to consist of giving and receiving. When this becomes imbalanced, and we are doing all the producing, all the giving and all the outflow, we will become exhausted, drained and begin to lose clarity of our purpose.

Even as we learn to have our hearts fed and nourished through God, we will need to set limits and boundaries on who has access to us and who is allowed to take our time, resources and availability. We need to give ourselves permission to say "no" or to take time out from people that have an exhausting effect.

Finding people to walk through life with and to enjoy the blessings of giving and receiving has a dramatic affect on how we live. If we have no people that can offer us love, care and companionship, we will feel isolated, alone and abandoned. We were not meant to live as reclusives; we were meant to operate in fellowship. We need to be with people who can see the vision God has placed in our lives, and encourage and push us towards that. We must pray for the supportive place where we can connect and build relationship within community.

For those people in our lives that are unhealthy, but have a permanent position, we can try to set and define how to walk in love, without allowing ourselves to become entangled, ensnared or bogged down in negativity. For those people that drain us but don't have a designated position, we may need to consider how and when we give them access. For instance, a persistent friend who uses us as a punching bag, may require more distance. Friends that have harmful behaviors, or ungodly influence may need to be removed altogether.

We often are highly influenced by the people we spend time with, thus if we are choosing people that can't see or affirm our God given destiny (unless they are family), it's time we make choices. *We are not called to produce "fruit" that can be eaten by anyone – we have been selected by God to produce fruit for His purposes. Be careful of the consumers in your life that weren't authorized to be there. They will steal the very fruit God intended to be used for someone else. And in this process, they may aid in ripping you off from your purpose and destiny.*

We can't change God's will, but we can agree to walk in it.

God has authored a plan in each of our lives, and as the Master Architect, the blueprint belongs to Him. He may give us access to His plans, and will typically deposit desires that are actually His desires. But He even limits how much access we have to see that. God has information that we don't have, thus makes decisions based on the fullness of His design. Some of these purposes out-ride our life here on earth, and will impact future generations. The Bible says:

"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. – Isaiah 55:8-9"

God's plan for us isn't just about us. It is intentionally being weaved into a much greater purpose than we can comprehend. When we live out God's will as if we are in charge, we can disillusion ourselves and find that we are not only changing the course of our future, but we may be hurting others in the process. God's will offers us safety – the only safety to stay on the course He has called.

The will of God operates by freedom. God doesn't seek to make us into robots where we live in bondage and agony over every situation, wondering what God wants us to do. God's will isn't something we try to figure out, it's something that happens to us as we walk in intimacy and connection. We don't need to fear missing God's will if we are intentionally asking to be placed in it, and being willing to allow Him to lead. God will correct, reverse or do whatever is necessary to assure that He leads us back safely.

Remember, some of the paths we follow don't look safe. They aren't safe or comfortable because of what they contain, they are safe because of who is leading us.

Some things to understand about discerning Gods' will.

- **God's will aligns with His written word.** Marley was seeking the Lord about her relationship with Alex, who had asked her to move in with him. She knew God knew she loved Alex and was committed in her heart to marry him if he asked. She reasoned and rationalized as to the decision God would have for her. But in reality, this an area that God had easily defined. Being in temptation to live with a man without marriage was not God's design for her. Marriage was. Sometimes we need to stay to stay with the basics of God's revealed Word. We live in a culture that has redefined truth – and so there is a great need to get the Word in us and understand it.
- **God's will leads with peace, even as you may experience anxiety.** When God begins to lead us in directions, He gives us the markers of peace. That doesn't mean we won't experience anxiety or fear along the way. God's grace and leading calls us to make decisions with courage. As we will learn shortly courage isn't the absence of fear; it's the choice to what's right despite fear. God's leading is a gentle burden, and a quiet urging. It won't yell, scream or dictate – but it will continue to pursue you with a peace.
- **God's will gives incredible freedom to make many decisions without God's input.** As we walk in connection, our decisions will be a natural outworking. Major choices and decisions may take some prayer, but hearing God's will is something to be in touch with Him. Many things God doesn't even need to give us advice for. For example, we don't need to ask him what color shirt we should buy, or how we set up our living room. However, we may need direction how to set a budget and how to remain within the confines of our spending. If we overly analyze God's perspective in small details, we may be agonized that we ever really know what He's going to say.
- **God's will cares about other people involved and thus has everyone's interest in mind.** God doesn't ask us to make decisions that will please people, but He does care about how our decision impact others. We may be asked to make decision that some people will not agree with. That's okay. But in making decisions, we need to keep the authority structure aligned. We can't make life changing decisions with disregard to the knowledge of our spouse. We may be asked to leave a job, a ministry, etc. But we still use honor-based methods of moving on.

ASSUMING COURAGE

The seed that breaks and roots into the ground makes a courageous decision to live. Once it leaves it's tiny seed format, it now relies entirely on the environment where it lays down its roots. To live God's design, we will be asked to take that leap of faith. We will be asked to do things that cause us to feel insecure and uncertain. Change will always require a risk, and it will create a need for courage.

The Hebrew word for "courageous" is *amets*. This means "to be stout, strong, bold, alert." True courage is born of God's Spirit – it lies in the strength of empowerment and the knowledge of God's sovereignty and position in all things. As Joshua was preparing to seize the Promised Land, God said:

This is my command--be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Josh 1:9

To walk with courage isn't the absence of fear. Instead, it is the addition of the substance of what courage contains in the challenges. Courage rises out of faith – it takes the perspective of an infinitely powerful God who is above, higher and fiercely interested in catapulting us into our destiny.

How often we have given up on God or simply didn't want to be set up for another disappointment. Fear of failure, rejection, loss or loneliness traps us in our personal prisons of the familiar. Fear isolates us from God's voice as it projects realities and truths that usually don't exist. As a result, it darkens our world from God's poten-

tial. It's vital that we capture our fears and begin to identify what they say. Fear and courage will war for domination, and thus understanding how fear attempts to capture us is a vital life skill.

Let's take a closer look:

1. Fear sends pictures and ideas into our life of devastation, pain, loss and failure. These pictures don't exist, thus they are merely an "idea." If we believe these ideas, we walk as though the fear is being spoken to us is our reality. In the spiritual realm, when fear is empowered, it can eventually become truth, not because we are punished for fear, but because we begin align ourselves under its message. Ask yourself, how does fear look and what pictures does it send? We can overcome this type of fear with God's promises, and asking Him to give us a picture of His perspective. Courage faces the fear and speaks back to it. It believes what God says, period.
2. Fear promotes us to see God as weak, unable, unwilling, unloving or simply detached from our needs. Once we begin to let fear have power, and let God be weak, we lose our connection. We begin to see the world through the filter of its broken realities, rather than see the world as falling under God's dominion and rule. When we let fear empower our lives, we need to learn speak back to it with God's truth. Find a promise that comes against your repetitive fears. Tape it over your home, your car and anywhere you need to be reminded. Courage doesn't believe in it's own strength, it trusts in the might, ferociousness and fierce reality of King Jesus.
3. Fear causes us to see ourselves as weak, victimized and unable to change our reality. While we are weak in our own strength, God has called us to walk in the empowerment of His resource and weapons. The truth is we are warriors, not weaklings. If we are looking towards human strengths and ability, we fail. But if we look to the God that sends us, we will find supernatural abilities. Peter walked on the water just so long as He believed that the water belonged to Jesus and it was subject to Him. He feared when he focused on the natural circumstances, the reality of water, as being more powerful than the Jesus that created it. When faced with fear, are your circumstances too big for God? Of course not. Courage laughs at the natural and draws from the supernatural.
4. Fear causes us to overly assert the power of people, while underestimating God's control. This is a common fear that leads to unthinkable pain and suffering. People matter, but they aren't the source of strength and power. Only God can take our foundation and solidify it through grace, then propel us into our destiny. People unknowingly serve their own fear, or their own need, thus they have no ability, none whatsoever, to speak over God. Ask God into each situation, who do I fear? Who do I trust? Who do I look at for strength? If we are merely trusting people, not God, we will experience failure.

We are always on a cliff of fear and courage. Choosing the perspective we will house will drive us where we go. Fear will drive us into survival (fight or flight). Courage will drive us into faith and into the wild journey of God's providence and His agenda for our lives. Which one do you want to find?

A REWARD TO COME

What's the true meaning of life? Do we only receive what this lifetime offers to us? Thank goodness the answer is absolutely not! Eternity has been set in our heart, thus in some ways we are craving what it offers and don't even know it. Eternity is our true home - it is where we will find the fulfillment we have sought and where our heart will receive the ultimate comfort. Everything that is broken inside us longs to be free. We often mistake the desire we have to reign with Jesus in Heaven, to wanting to perfectly fix our world in the here and now. This world will never be pure; and even as we grow to be like God, we will not arrive at perfection. Our promises is that we will seize an eternal land, a "new heaven, and a new earth" where there are no tears, no sorrow and no struggles. Oh glorious truth!

Not only do we have the promise of heaven as our eternal destination, but the Bible is very clear that we are acquiring rewards on earth that will be cashed in heaven. The fruit we are producing in this world has an eter-

nal implication. In fact, most of our rewards will not be realized until we enter heaven's gates. It can be hard to live with the knowledge that our true reward comes after this life. But if we can make that an anchor to our soul, we'll live out our life different.

How we experience intimacy with God today apparently will transfer into heaven, as will all our actions done in love. The Bible tells us we have an actual moment in history when the work we did on earth will be evaluated. Interestingly enough, it's not evaluated by how well we performed, or how much activity we did. God is actually evaluating our intimacy and rewards us in accordance to the works that God first laid hold of.

We are created to be in relationship with God where we experience him and know Him, and thus bear fruit that births His plans. Intimacy in the physical sense between husband and wife bear offspring; and so it our life of spiritual intimacy means to bear an abundant harvest. In truth, the "fruit" we produce gets marked. If it's authentically produced from intimacy (connection) to God, it will contain His fingerprints. All fruit generated by the Holy Spirit has the markings of love. Like checking the DNA to authenticate a birth parent, so does God run our fruit through the DNA check of His spirit. The things we produced in and through Him, will have an eternal value. The things that aren't a product of intimacy, will not have eternal value.

Our judgment day isn't one of seeing if we are worthy for heave. The blood of Jesus already claimed us. It's a day of evaluating the nature of the fruit we produced while on earth.

The Bible says this:

But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. - 1 Cor 3:13-15

This idea is that doing "good things" for God isn't enough. God will want to be the one that initiated, covers, purifies and leads our works done through His grace. If we think we have to earn God's favor, we will be overwhelmed, we will also miss the mark. But if we begin to understand Jesus just wants *us*, not what we *give* to Him, we will be free to be released into our destiny.

Do you know Him?

One day you will encounter Jesus face to face. This will either be as spectacular moment of meeting your King and Savior; of embracing His hands, of touching His face, of seeing His eyes. Or, it will be an awkward moment of meeting someone that we didn't know that well. The fact you are reading this is the best initiative you have to avoid that day unprepared. The truth is that none of us know when our time on earth expires. The Bible warns us to be ready, and to wait for Jesus to come. That return could be with the coming of the end of the world, or when he individually calls us. This is called living with expectancy. Being expectant isn't being fearful, it's being prepared. Jesus warned continuously in His ministry that we need to be prepared because that day will come upon

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. - Matthew 24:42-43

so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. - 1 Thessalonian 5:6

This living with awareness, expectancy and sobriety is the call to take the mantle of God's grace and to stand firm in our hope and confidence in His love and purposes. But above all else, it's an invitation to "know Him." There is nothing that can reward any more than being in relationship with the Living God of the Universe.

LIVE OUT GOD'S PLANS

You only have once chance, one opportunity to make your life on earth, and store up treasures in heaven. This isn't a call to "do" but a call of surrender. It's a call to *miseo*, to make one choice in lieu of the other. However, where do you begin? How do you know what God wants or is bringing into your life *right now*? A good place to start is the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4 says "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires." God is capable of purifying our desires. If we don't know where to begin, this is the place.

Action Step: Write Your Life Plan

1. If you've written your life story, it told of where you have been. It expressed the obstacles and the situations that shaped and formed you today. It expressed your wounds, your failures and hurts. Imagine your life story being a book. You've finished a portion of the book, but the next chapter it waiting to be written. If your life stayed the same or ended in the next week (God forbid!), would you be content? Did you accomplish God's will? Is there something you still long to accomplish?

If you could write the ending to your life story, no matter how outrageous or impossible it may sound, what would it contain? Use a separate piece of paper to write your deepest dreams and desires at all levels of your life: physical, spiritually, relationally, mentally, emotionally, in ministry, in career. This life story is what could be, the potential you place before the Lord. If you are tempted to set limits by saying "there is no way" push through it. This is your dream. Be honest with yourself and with God.

2. Out of that life story, see if the original goals you had at all matched. Did you set goals that matched the dreams of your heart? Why or why not? Did you limit yourself by confining to the comfort of the familiar, rather than take a risk? Were you simply unable to set goals because it was too overwhelming, too vague, too confusing? Are you ready now? What happened in between to change your mind?

SET PRIORITIES

Time is the most sacred resource you have. If you only had one tank of gas to use, you would monitor each trip, making sure it had value. If you had only \$10 to your name, it too, would be used wisely and cautiously. In reality, time is limited and we only have so much energy to invest in the priorities of life. If you could take the totality of your time left on earth, where would you want to direct it? To your family, a dream, ministry, etc.? For the things that you choose to make your priority, there will be others things, even good things, that may have to go. We can't do everything and be everything to everyone. If you had to select only ten priorities - which are actually investments of the heart - what ten things would you choose?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

These are the things that are vital. They take priority and require intentional work to make sure they are nurtured

and loved. Everything else in your life falls underneath these priorities. That means you may have to sacrifice other things to spend more time investing on these things you stated matter. Having an affection in your heart is not enough. You can feel in your heart that you love someone and that they are important, but if you never take action that corresponds to that, you aren't actually investing. Love is action - it means you will nurture, invest and count these things as precious.

REVISE GOALS

Your dreams at some level should reflect your priorities. Dreams can't compromise the things and people that matter to us - they should coincide with them. For a dream to become a reality, there needs to be a plan in place. Goals, as we learned in week 2 help us attain our dreams. While in the "dreaming" state, goals are idealistic, meaning that they have no tangible way of being attained. This dreaming state is also the purifying state. It's where we need to learn to surrender things to God, and to understand what we can change, and what we can't change. He sometimes takes a dream away or He strengthen it and gives it clarity. If a dream remains, it can become a long-term goal.

Long-term Goals

Long-term goals span far into the future. They are typically more than a year away, and we will not see them realized immediately. Some of the goals you listed in Week 2 were probably long-term goals. Return back to those goals or begin a new list. Find six long-term goals based on what you have learned about yourself.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Short-term goals

Short-term goals are your "now" goals. Understanding your dreams and your long-term goals, these are what you can do to change your life in the nearer future. We may have wrote some of these out in Week 2. Have your goals changed? Do you need to add or take anything away?

Using the same tool that was introduced in Week 2, this is the time to develop monthly, weekly and daily goals. The reason we want to plan and use goals is it helps launch and empower us into movement. These can be the same goals you wrote in Week 2, but simply list them to re-affirm them. Once listed, develop your personal planning tool or use the ones provided in Week 2 to launch you into daily, weekly and monthly planning. You may find that you astonishingly have more clarity at this point. This is a vital life lesson. Growth will always change your perspective of your goals. If you find that you were unable to write goals in Week 2, but you feel ready to right now, it's a sign of life and growth. But with that, remember the goals you have today may also change. Always be willing to remain flexible.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

TOOLS TO SUCCESS

This workshop was a tool box. It contained resources to help you learn to access your potential and your God given design. The process was meant to help you find a means to the end; but the workshop isn't the end itself. Jesus is the end. The relationship we have with Father God is the very reason we have done this each week. Have you been following along? You have been faithful and can implement these tools in your daily walk. Let's recap what we learned:

1. Live with intention, be mindful, choice-driven and aware of what is happening. Remember, God always give us a choice to obey Him.
2. Plan your life- set your goals and your priorities and live for each day.
3. Focus on connection to God and His character. Read His Word but meditate on it becoming an actual experience
4. Understand the needs of your heart and how you were malnourished. See control patterns that you learned to use to overcome the deficiencies you faced in childhood. Remind yourself that God can take care of you now.
5. Be intentional in thoughts and beliefs; challenge your decisions and challenge why you think what you think
6. Embrace your emotional life and seek answers to it - if your emotions could speak, what would they say? Allow yourself to feel, and to grieve.
7. Nurture love and connection with God, yourself and others.
8. Embrace forgiveness, and take yourself back to the courtroom when you feel unworthy, not enough, etc. Write "I am accepted and loved because Jesus loved me first" into your daily dialogue
9. Be aware of the snare of resentment. Be cautious with your action and your sentiments towards others. Use triggering events as tools that expose relationships that may require more intensive work
10. Empower yourself with spiritual weapons – ask Holy Spirit to keep you in the light and teach you fight with the tools He offers to you. Be confident that you are above, not below the enemy. Walk in your authority as a child of God.
11. Regard the sanctity of relationships through the filter of intimacy, authority, responsibility and boundaries.
12. Be aware of God's designs and honor their position, even when they aren't working. Commit to the changes God would have you to make.
13. Allow God to unleash your gifts through opportunities.
14. Cultivate connection and be aware of your vulnerabilities, weakness and areas that God needs to strengthen
15. Live with an eternal perspective, but live in the moment with intentionality.

YOUR MISSION

1. In one statement, write why you think you were created (be specific).

2. In one statement, write what matters the most to you (be specific).

3. In one statement, write how you believe God wants to use you

Write your mission statement:

Using the statements above, combine them to make a mission statement.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and is set against a dark background.

Father God,

Write the mission statement onto my heart and allow it to guide me in my decisions. Never allow me to forget where I've been or where I am going. Help me find destiny and stay on course with my calling. Help me not to back down or give up when it hurts. Remind me of my Heavenly Destiny when life itself hurts. Remind me that you will wipe every tear and dry every eye according to the glorious hope in Jesus. Thank you that my life has opportunities, and that you see each fear, each need and broken place in me. Help me above all else to connect to you and to produce the fruit of your DNA, of your design. Rid me from anything that is eating and consuming sacred space in my heart - prune me so I can be filled and used by you.

In Jesus name - Amen