

Week Three: What Goes Into a Life Worth Living?

Gather

Welcome! Take a few minutes to reconnect before jumping into the material. Continue to prioritize getting to know one another, and remember the practices that help make these groups work: **start and end on time, make room for everyone, listen as well as you talk, resist the urge to fix or give advice, and treat what is shared personally with care and confidentiality.**

Watch & Reflect

Watch the Week Three video together if you have not already done so. This week's conversation draws largely from **Part Three of *Life Worth Living*** and asks us to think about three different dimensions of our lives:

- **Our Agency:** What can I choose? How will I respond to what happens? This is emphasized particularly in **Stoic philosophy**.
- **Our Circumstances:** What is actually happening in my life? What conditions contribute to flourishing or suffering? This is important in **Utilitarian thought**.
- **Our Emotional and Relational Lives:** How are our feelings, relationships, and connections with others shaping our lives? **Confucian thought** particularly emphasizes our interconnectedness and relationships.

These are not necessarily competing answers. Think back to the **recipe** image from the video. A life worth living may involve all three, mixed together in different proportions at different times.

And we are all created differently! Some of us naturally lead with reason and agency. Others are more attentive to feelings or relationships. And, of course, there is the old joke that these people have a remarkable tendency to marry each other!

Discussion and Going Deeper

1. **Which of these tends to be your default?** Where do you naturally begin when you are trying to make sense of your life?
2. Patrick raised the possibility of doing a little **“self-counseling.”** Instead of simply reacting to what is happening, we can step back and become curious about ourselves.
3. Not to answer the self-counseling questions for the wider group, but as you look at these questions, would this be hard or easy for you? Where might your faith speak into these?

4. How comfortable are you stepping back and asking yourself questions like these? Is this something you already do, or does it feel unfamiliar?

The REALLY Big Questions

This week also takes us into two enormous questions:

Where are we?

Who are we?

There is an extraordinary tension in the Christian understanding of human life.

We are **beloved children of God**, created with purpose. Ephesians 2:10 describes us as God's *workmanship* or *handiwork*, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

And yet we are also astonishingly small. We are finite creatures, living for a relatively brief time on one planet orbiting one star in an incomprehensibly large universe. Scripture reminds us that **we are dust**.

Discussion and Going Deeper

1. How do you hold those truths together?
 - i. **"I am beloved."** **"I am dust."**
2. Does one come more naturally to you? What might be lost when we forget either side?
3. If you have time, you can go a little deeper and share the types of circumstances or the feelings that cause you to lean one way or another.
4. Are there practices that you have found that help you stay in balance?

Pray for One Another

Before you close, share **one thing from your own life** that you would like this group to hold in prayer this week. Perhaps it is a circumstance you cannot control, a response you are trying to choose, an emotion you are carrying, or simply a place where you need to remember that you are both **beloved and finite**.

Keep the prayer close to home. The purpose here is not primarily to collect prayer requests for people outside the group, but to learn to **know, support, and pray for each other in the group**.

Facilitator of the week, please close the group with prayer. You might simply lift up what has been shared and ask God for wisdom, courage, peace, and the grace to live more fully into the lives we have been given. You can also close by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Self counseling questions: A word of care: Sometimes honest reflection opens doors we did not expect. If this conversation brings up something that feels overwhelming, please reach out to one of the pastors. We are glad to listen, help you process, or help connect you with someone who can.

- **What is going on in my life right now?**
- Are my **circumstances** overwhelming everything else?
- Are my **feelings** driving my responses?
- Where do I actually have **agency**, even if I cannot change the circumstances?
- What part of the “recipe” of my life is leading right now?
- **Is an important ingredient missing?**