

Welcome

What keeps you from being fully present in the moment? For me, it's my phone. I live a lot of my life in front of a screen, emailing, writing, engaging on social media. So, like many millennials, I've gotten into the habit of scrolling on my phone. It's not on purpose, most of the time. I'll be watching TV, or finishing up dinner and someone says, "Did you hear what I just said?"

I realize in that moment I'm staring at a screen, scrolling. Mindless. No notification, no urgent email. Just... habit. Wasting time. It's bad enough when I'm alone - I could be curled up with a good book or focused on my work. But when I'm with other people, it's a huge problem. Because what I'm communicating to my wife, my housemates, my friends is that whatever's on my screen is less important than who's in the room with me.

And that's just never true.

Now, I don't want to talk about technology today (or at least not *just* about screens). I want to talk about being present. So again, the question: What keeps you from being fully present in the moment? When you're with your spouse or your kids, what pulls you away? When a conversation with a neighbor or co-worker has the opportunity to push below the surface into some real stuff, what keeps you buoyed to the surface?

Maybe, like me, it's a screen. But it could be busyness - maybe you get so caught up in *doing stuff* you forget the people you're doing it for. Or maybe it's a hobby or a travel schedule or a habit. I want you to ask that question of yourself today: what keeps me from having quality time with the people God has put in my life?

God calls us to be present, to be mindful of how we use our time. God gives us all the same 24 hours in a day. Today, we're going to ask what happens when we take seriously how we invest those hours in the relationships God has given us.

The journey of mindfulness begins with gratitude toward the God who has given us our days and our relationships. So let's begin by worshipping this God together.

Message

We just celebrated Jesus' resurrection last week with Easter. We celebrated the resurrection as proof that God is faithful to us. So for the next several weeks, we're going to consider how God's faithfulness to us changes our relationships. After all, relationships are the heart of faith. Jesus calls us into a relationship with him *and* with each other.

The bad news, unfortunately, is that there aren't any shortcuts to healthy relationships. I wish there were some secret book of the Bible they give preachers, for us to keep behind glass -- break only in case of emergency, and we pull out 1 and 2 Relations and BOOM everything's magically better.

But unfortunately that's not how relationships work. It takes effort on our parts to get good at healthy relationships.

The good news is that God created us to be in relationships. Relating with other people is in our DNA. And by raising Jesus from the dead, God has invited us to rediscover who we were created to be.

[Scripture Slide] Turn with me to Ephesians 5. This is a letter written to the Church in Ephesus, and the overall purpose of the letter is to give a big picture of what it means to be God's Church, the body of Christ formed and held together by the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.

Toward the end of the letter, the author is moving toward wrapping up and makes this great statement in verses 15 and following:

Be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. -- Ephesians 5:15-17

Be careful how you live (the actual Greek there is "watch" or "pay attention"). Live like the wise, and *make the most of every opportunity*.

These verses get used a lot to talk about our work - either our vocations or how we serve in the Church. I've heard it used to talk about our leisure time, too. Which is good. It's all good.

But I've never (at least as I can remember) heard this used to talk about our *relationships*. Which is odd, because if relationships are the heart of faith, then surely this applies to relationships.

What does it mean for us to take our relationships seriously, to make the most of every opportunity in our relationships? What does it mean to engage in our relationships *thoughtfully* (not thoughtlessly)?

Psychologists make a distinction between quality time and quantity time. Quantity time is being around people. But as you know, we can be *around* people and not be with them. It's the coworker in the cubicle down the row whose name you're not sure about, even though you've worked together for years. It's the dinner where you didn't really talk about anything deeper than the weather. It's turning on a TV show at the end of the night with your spouse and just shutting your brain off (the married version of Netflix & Chill).

You can be there, but not be present.

Mindfulness has become a trendy term in the last couple of years, and for good reason - we're a culture that's easily distracted. But Ephesians reminds us that we weren't created to run on autopilot. A holy life is a fully engaged life. We don't sleepwalk through our relationships. We pay attention. We're *mindful*.

The first step for a lot of us to give quality time to the people God has drawn into our lives is acknowledging there's a real difference between Quality time and Quantity time. We can spend a *lot* of time with people and not actually be giving them much.

That's important to recognize because I don't know many of us who are sitting around with a ton of extra time on their hands. We all lead busy lives, which makes this conversation all the more urgent: we don't have an infinite *quantity* of time to give. So how do we make the most of the time we do have?

One question we need to ask is, "Who's getting our best?" Ephesians told us to be wise, and I love this nugget of wisdom from the book of proverbs:

A bowl of vegetables with someone you love is better than steak with someone you hate. -- Proverbs 15:17

This speaks directly to our Texan hearts, doesn't it? Being with people you love is better than being with people you hate. I want to flip the proverb around a little bit and ask, "Who's getting your steak?"

Is it people on social media? People in your office? Your family?

Are you giving your best to the people who matter the most? Are you investing your best in the best people in your life?

If you're married, is your spouse getting your best or whatever you bring home in the doggie bag? If you have kids, are they getting your attention and care, or are you sharing space with them until bedtime? If you're caring for an aging parent, are you attentive to the time you get with them, not just the work you're giving?

People who live in the same house as us is probably the easiest example, but the reality is that God calls us into relationships with all kinds of people. Maybe it's a neighbor you can't get out of your head. Or that coworker who keeps demanding your attention. The barista you see every morning.

Some of the people God calls us to give our best to are obvious (especially if you have a spouse, partner or kids). But others take prayer to discern - is that coworker a calling or are they just needy? Is that boss demanding or someone God has placed in our lives?

But we have to ask the question: who deserves the best we have? That helps us figure out who's getting our best, and whether that needs to change.

That's what it means to be mindful about our relationships. We think about what our best is, and about who's getting it. And we make changes, if necessary.

This is easier for you introverts. You know how to do quality really well. Extroverts like me prefer to flit from relationship to relationship - our social circles tend to be a mile wide and an inch deep. But we all have to ask the question: Who is God calling us to share that steak with? Are we giving our best to the people who deserve our best? Or are we wasting it?

Of course even if we're being mindful about who gets our time, that doesn't automatically mean we can just flip a quality time switch. We can't sit down across from someone else and go, "Let's have QUALITY time!"

So the other part of being mindful is about choosing to make space where quality time can happen. So maybe instead of binging that Netflix show, you go for a walk together. Or make use of that porch. Talk about what you're reading together. Play a game together.

Or if it's a co-worker, try having lunch together, but leave your phone at your desk, so you can be fully present in the meal.

We can't force quality time, but we can nurture it. We can leave our screens and agendas behind. We can put ourselves in a position where it can happen. We can develop spaces free of distraction where we can be fully present. How?

One of the oldest human forms of quality time is the shared meal - and it's one our culture has moved away from. My housemates have a great dinner ritual - several times a week, they eat dinner around the table together, and share highs and lows. Not every meal yields a deep, meaningful conversation. But the ritual of high/low occasionally creates deep, meaningful conversation.

That's the power of rituals in our relationships. Every moment won't be quality. But when we do the same things over and over, share the same moments, the same experiences, they create spaces for that quality exchange to bloom.

That's why we created C-Groups - they're an intentional space we can set aside. Every single time my C-group meets isn't a magical spiritual experience. But the consistent, regular habit of meeting together has led to real moments of deepening of relationships that has led to stronger friendships with each other.

Friends, God calls us to be a mindful people. We can choose to see every moment as a gift from our creator, an opportunity to push deeper into those relationships we were created for. But we live in a world that wants to numb us to the world around us, to draws us into newsfeeds and timelines and spreadsheets and carpoos. A world that reduces people to customers or tasks or burdens.

To be mindful is to resist that diminishment. To be present is to insist that the people around us are created in God's image, that they are vital to us.

We want to be a mindful church, an intentional church. If we want healthy relationships, the kinds of relationships that are food for our spirits, the kind of relationships that make us come alive, we have to ask those hard questions: Who is God calling me into relationship with? And am I doing what I can to be present, to create space for that quality time to flourish?

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] We see Jesus' intention in preparing and sharing this table with us.

1. When was I fully present this week?
2. When was I distracted or absent?
3. When will I be tempted to be absent or distracted?
4. How can I practice mindfulness?

Assignment + Blessing

Two questions:

1. What relationships is God calling me deeper into?
2. How can I be more mindful?