READY or NOT
Leaning into Life in Our Twenties

DREW MOSER & JESS FANKHAUSER
I can think of no two people better equipped to help twentysomethings make the most of these volatile years. I wish I had this book when I finished college almost five years ago. Read this book and live your life with worshipful intentionality.

Chris Martin, founder of MillennialEvangelical.com and development specialist at LifeWay Christian Resources

This probing and practical book consolidates the best Christian thinking on life’s purpose and presents it in an engaging way. In the midst of many competing messages about what young adulthood is about, I hope every twentysomething will prayerfully engage this work among friends.

Katelyn Beaty, author of A Woman’s Place and Christianity Today editor at large

In Ready or Not we are invited into a conversation about the most important things in life . . . hope, purpose, and meaning. Taking serious questions seriously, the book is a remarkable guide for those wanting honest help along the way as vocations are formed and loves become incarnate. Never ivory-tower, Drew Moser and Jess Fankhauser draw on hours and years of life in the world of twentysomethings, offering the wisdom and experience born of their own thoughtful engagement of the challenges facing folks in college and beyond who want to make sense
of life, who they are, why they are, and how they are going to live.

Steven Garber, author of *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* and professor of marketplace theology and leadership, Regent College

Drew and Jess seem to have their fingers on the pulse of this generation and the hope, dreams, and questions that each of us face. If you are in your twenties and find yourself looking for wisdom and insight into your life, read this book.

Nathan Clarkson, actor, filmmaker, and bestselling author of *Different*, www.nathanclarkson.me

*Ready or Not* takes an in-depth look into the hopes, fears, questions, and realities of what it’s like to be a twentysomething in the world today. It offers wisdom for those who want to make these years count. The authors know their audience and have provided a very hopeful tool for this generation.

Ben Nugent, national director, Nav20s (The Navigators)
READY or NOT
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DREW MOSER & JESS FANKHAUSER
SO, WHAT ARE MY TWENTIES FOR, ANYWAY?

Not all those who wander are lost.
J. R. R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

Think and wonder. Wonder and think.
Dr. Seuss

Sometimes we discover something we knew all along, but now we really know. Something that stops us dead in our tracks. This happened to Juan.

Juan, a twenty-six-year-old sales professional, looked at his phone to check the time: 6:30 p.m. It had been another long day at the office, and it was time to go home. A forty-five-minute commute awaited him. He shrugged his shoulders, sighed, and packed his messenger bag. Then he logged off his computer, exited his workstation, and walked through his office suite, saying good-bye to a few of his coworkers.

Juan’s career as an effective sales rep for a large food company looked bright. He was hitting his sales target, his bosses were taking notice, there was plenty of room for advancement, and his company was growing. But something that
happened earlier in the afternoon had shaken him, and he was trying to make sense of it.

A few hours earlier, he had attended a company-wide sales meeting intended to rally the troops, cast vision, and inspire reps to meet new targets. Juan had no problems with any of this. He was a hard worker, an achiever who liked a challenge. What shook him was a specific phrase the corporate head of sales used—one of those simple, matter-of-fact statements that suddenly caused Juan to take a step back and see the world around him more clearly.

From the podium, the head of sales had exclaimed, “The reasons for these new sales targets? More profit. Happier shareholders. Simple as that.”

Juan gulped. He’d known all along that companies need to make money, and investors invest money to make more of it. But he was suddenly struck with the realization that all of his twelve-hour workdays, all of his achieving and striving, all the saying no to friends who wanted him to knock off early to have dinner out were simply to meet a corporate bottom line.

“It was a good company,” Juan explained to us recently, “a good job. I’m not against a company making money, and I’m okay with shareholders making a good return. I don’t know. I guess I just began to question why I was doing what I was doing. I was so focused on work that I realized I wasn’t doing anything else meaningful. And I began to question whether it was worth it.”

The very next day, Juan called a friend of a friend who
was opening a restaurant. The owner had been looking for help. To make a long story short, Juan is now a manager at a restaurant you very well may frequent. He offered this reflection on his relatively dramatic job change: “I’m working harder than in my old job, but I love it! And the crazy thing is, even though I’m working harder, I’m no longer all work all the time. I do other important things now too.”

Anyone can tell that Juan traded one profit-hungry company for another. Both are focused on the bottom line, but Juan’s perspective is completely different. He still works hard. His boss still takes notice, but he is flourishing in a way he wasn’t before.

How do we make sense of this?

The twenties are marked with moments like the one Juan experienced at the company-wide sales meeting, moments where you may feel disoriented, discontent, and confused. These moments can cause you to feel caught in a land of in between, a place where you feel stuck somewhere you don’t want to be but unsure of how to get out.

At times your “in-betweenness” may find you facing two very good but completely different options. This was true of Jen, a twenty-two-year-old college senior. She came into my (Drew’s) office looking stressed on a cold, snowy day in the middle of an Indiana winter.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Well,” Jen replied a bit sheepishly, “here’s the thing. My housemates sat me down last night and tried to talk me out of taking the internship I lined up so I can backpack with
them in Europe after graduation. I don’t know what to do. I feel like the adult thing to do would be to take the internship. It’s an amazing opportunity. But I also feel like I’ve got the rest of my life to work, and one last hurrah with my friends in Europe would be amazing. I feel torn between what I probably should do and what I want to do . . . and what my friends are pressuring me to do.”

It’s true, Jen did have an amazing opportunity before her—a postgraduate internship at a top public-relations firm in downtown Chicago. It wasn’t just a job. It was a launching pad for a great career. It’s probably helpful to note that Jen was no slacker. She was a leader on campus, a hard worker, and a thoughtful, smart, dedicated person.

Yet Jen was caught in the vortex of mixed messages swirling throughout her twenties. She felt the perceived expectations of her college, her church, and her family pulling her in one direction (toward a stable career). But she also felt a pull in the seemingly opposite direction to extend the good times just a little longer and delay “adulting” a bit more. One path offered stability, responsibility, and common sense. The other, exploration, adventure, and carefree fun.

Jen’s dilemma could be considered in a couple of ways: (1) as a First World problem, or (2) as a choice between what others felt she should do and what she really wanted to do.

Jen faced two enticing but vastly different options. Her choices felt like a coin flip. The advantages and disadvantages seemed opposite and neutralizing. As we talked, she dug a bit deeper. It became clear that behind Jen’s choice of an
internship or the Europe trip was, in fact, a much deeper, vitally important question that deserved more consideration than the flip of a coin.

It was the very same quandary Juan experienced.

It’s a question of purpose, significance, and direction that haunts our twenties: What are my twenties for, anyway?

Instead of defining a single moment in your life, it defines the many moments that comprise a decade. It’s a question rife with tension and anxiety, full of your own expectations and those of parents, churches, employers, friends, and professors. It’s a question we’ll explore in this book.

You won’t find another book that will challenge you to lean into this question quite the way this one does. This book will uniquely equip you to thrive in your twenties, but without pat answers, simple formulas, or condescension. It’s a tall order, we know. Your twenties are filled with voices telling you what you should do with your life. Maybe you’ve had to deal with passive-aggressive questions or suggestions from relatives at family gatherings. Or the unending parental wisdom of completing a business degree to compensate for that art major. The voices may even come from the deluge of books and news articles shaming your generation for your lack of focus, your entitled sensibilities, and your quirkiness.

At the same time, much of your world conveys a very different message: You can (and should) have it all. Your twenties exist for you to be free! So wander, live a carefree life, and enjoy your twenties before you’re tied down with
a mortgage, a marriage, and a career. Don’t date seriously. Don’t get chained to a desk. Don’t settle.

There’s even a label slapped on this phase of your life: emerging adulthood.¹ In other words, you aren’t a fully mature adult. You are *emerging* as an adult, and it’ll take you the entirety of your twenties to get there. And while you emerge, you can live with your parents.

According to a Pew Research study, half of millennials under the age of twenty-five live with Mom and Dad, as do a quarter of millennials between twenty-five and twenty-nine.² Surely, legitimate cultural and economic forces—such as economic instability, skyrocketing rent, and cultural family norms—are at play here, but regardless of the reasons, these statistics reinforce the message to a skeptical society that twentysomethings live with as few strings attached as possible for as long as possible.

Step back for a moment and consider this message. Then ask yourself, *Is this carefree life really so amazing and carefree?* There’s societal pressure to live it up in your twenties. Have the most amazing adventures. See as much as you can. Laugh the hardest. And Instagram and Snapchat it all so others can see what an amazing time you’re having.

If this is what society expects, then nothing is really, truly expected of you (other than proof you’re having a great time). The twenties become an in-between land, an already-but-not-yet phase of adulthood. A neutral zone between a fun, carefree childhood and boring adulthood. Nothing much is expected of you, other than posting an entertaining
social-media feed. Not much is asked. The twenties are simply a ten-year transitional phase of life.

Or are they?

Jump-starting your way out of the land of in between into adulthood is often (but not always) expensive and saturated with expectation. What is this remedy for an aimless life? The definitive institution where you go to take life by the horns and wrestle it in the right direction. An institution glorified in movies and derided in the media. College.

College: The FOMO Place

Ben, one of the cleverer twentysomethings Jess and I have ever worked with, describes college this way: “It’s a place where you are supposed to have the time of your life and figure out your life at the same time. Don’t miss out on all the fun, all the experiences, and all the opportunities. FOMO (fear of missing out) and ROI (return on investment), both full throttle.”

He’s onto something. College is this place where all your hopes and dreams (are supposed to) come true. It’s the place you leave home for to find yourself. Jess and I work at a college and love it. We believe in the transformative power of education in community. And yet we recognize that college can also have a hopelessly disorienting effect.

When you enter college, you’re afforded more choices for your future than ever before. Hundreds of majors, dozens of clubs and activities, trips over here and trips over there. You can do just about anything. Yet if you can do almost
anything, how in the world can you possibly choose one thing to study or pursue?

There are two common reactions to all this freedom of choice. First, the dizzying array of options can lead to feeling overwhelmed (and even paralyzed) over how to proceed. This is when you shut down, turning off the decision-making parts of your brain to avoid the headaches. The second reaction is to ramp up the FOMO-fueled chaos and dive right into a voluminous number of college experiences. If you experience everything, you reason, something will work out.

If you left home to attend a faith-based college or were involved in a campus ministry at a secular university, chances are you were given (either directly or indirectly) a clear, though perhaps unspoken, expectation: By the time you graduate, you should (a) know exactly what you want to do for the rest of your life, (b) be completely clear on what your calling is, and (c) find your spouse. Reinforcing these subtle yet powerful expectations are adages such as “Ring by spring” (a popular expression for getting engaged before graduation) and “Don’t be a super senior” (in other words, make up your mind so you don’t have to spend an extra year at college). If you didn’t come from a church-based background but your peers did, you may find these expectations confusing.

But is everyone supposed to settle into a lifelong career by the age of twenty? Is there even such a thing as a lifelong career anymore? Is everyone supposed to marry by age twenty-two?

Upon graduation, despite good grades and great experiences, many twentysomethings face an uncertain future.
The late southern novelist Walker Percy famously wrote, “I made straight A’s and flunked ordinary living.” It’s a terrifying prospect to finish high school, college, or even graduate school and fall flat on your face in adulthood. It’s a tough world out there. The average twentysomething will have more than a handful of jobs during this in-between decade and will change residences multiple times. If you graduate from college but don’t have a serious relationship, a career path, and a clear sense of calling, it can feel demoralizing. Such so-called freedom eventually loses its luster.

As psychologist Meg Jay has observed, “It seems everybody wants to be a twentysomething except for many twentysomethings themselves.” Our friend Ben agrees, putting it this way: “The twenties are the best of life and the worst of life, and I can’t tell whether something is amazing or terrible half the time.”

This is the dilemma Jen and Juan faced, as well as twentysomethings everywhere: the pressure to figure out life versus the pressure to enjoy life as much as possible. These polarizing pressures leave many twentysomethings with a sense of despair. How do you make sense of these conflicting messages? And what role does faith play in it all?

The “Defining Decade”: Hope, Purpose, Meaning

Your twentys are meant to take a decade. You shouldn’t be expected to figure out every aspect of your life during this season. To do so hurries you through incredibly important
decisions that should not be rushed. Nor should your twenties be wasted. In this land of in between, a path can be carved. This book will equip you to live your twenties with hope, purpose, and meaning.

Hope. Your twenties should be a decade marked by hope, a time of exponential growth and potential when you can fully live your life and prepare for what’s next with great expectation. This should be an exciting time in your life, and you should be looking forward to all that’s ahead of you. It’s a season to be fully present yet hopefully prepared. English novelist George Meredith wrote, “To hope, and not be impatient, is really to believe.”5 These are wise words for your twenties. Impatience can ruin some really good years.

The author of Hebrews penned these words: “Hope [is] an anchor for the soul.”6 That’s a powerful image! Hope provides moorings that steady you as you seek your direction in life. It also puts your desires and longings in their proper place. The twenties are filled with ideas, questions, dreams, and expectations that often take time to unfold. Hope sustains you in the meantime.

Purpose. All your hopes and dreams may not be fulfilled in your twenties. Patience will be required in abundance. However, this doesn’t mean this season of your life has no purpose. It is, in fact, intended to be a deeply purposeful time in which many important dimensions of the good life are developed. Your twenties aren’t just a holding room for real life in the future; they are real life.

Meaning. Holocaust survivor and psychologist Viktor
Frankl, in his timeless book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, offered much wisdom for this phase in life, writing that our “main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in . . . life.” In our search for meaning, we discover the deepest fulfillment in life, regardless of our circumstances. Such meaning is found in both joy and heartache. This is what makes life rich, complex, and sometimes confusing. Frankl argued that our search for meaning may bring inner tension before it brings inner peace. How you respond to that inner tension in your twenties is crucial to your pursuit of a good and faithful life.

Jess and I agree with marketing guru Seth Godin, who has often said, “You are more powerful than you think you are. Act accordingly.” We believe in your ability to explore and live the good life here and now. This book is no prescription for success. We aren’t self-help gurus peddling a cure-all formula for your life. We are also (we hope) not your curmudgeonly old neighbors wagging our proverbial fingers at you and shouting, “Stop messing around and start acting like an adult—AND GET OFF MY LAWN!”

Rather, as of this writing, one of us (Jess) is a twenty-something, and the other (Drew) used to be. We not only care deeply for twentysomethings, but we’ve devoted our careers to working with them and have chosen to live among them.

In this book, we want to provide you with a compelling, interactive framework that allows you to live peacefully in the present and move confidently into the future by understanding and exploring what it looks like to live faithfully in
the key dimensions of life. In essence, we hope to encourage you to embrace your twenties with true freedom rather than fear and anxiety.

Annie Dillard once wrote, “How we spend our days is . . . how we spend our lives.”9 We think it’s true. Each of us is shaped by our habits and practices. We won’t rush you into a simplistic plan. Nor will we advise you to delay key aspects of your life until your thirties.

The twentysomething years matter and are worth not just wandering through but living fully.

We believe that you are called to lean into your twenties, and the following mantras, which we’ll unpack later in the book, reinforce this concept:

1  **Be fully present and fully prepared.** In your twenties, it’s all too tempting to focus on one of these at the expense of the other. The best way to lean into your twenties is to embrace the tension of being fully present and fully prepared.

2  **Actively participate.** When things get hard, it’s easy to check out. Leaning into your twenties requires active participation in the dimensions that make up a good life.

3  **Live implicated.** To live implicated in your twenties requires having eyes that truly see what’s happening in and around your life, and a heart and mind that recognize your responsibility to be about God’s restorative and redemptive work in the world.
Embrace freedom, not fear. Adulthood can be a scary place, and fear can too easily dominate. Yet adulthood can also be a freeing place. Embrace the freedom, not the fear.

About This Book

The title of this book is intentional. Ready or not, you’re a twentysomething. You can coast your way through this season of life, or you can make the most of it by leaning into your twenties with hope, purpose, and meaning. Here’s what we’ve found to be true in our own lives and the lives of those older than us: We encounter the tension of ready-or-not situations in every decade of life. Why not embrace that tension now, in your twenties?

Your twenties can be overwhelming, which is why we often encourage twentysomethings to consider fathoming their twenties. An ancient nautical term, a fathom is a measurement that helped sailors calculate the depth of a body of water. Sailors would stretch out their arms, holding a sounding line across the length of their reach, typically about six feet. Then they would lower the sounding line into the water, counting each fathom as they went. To fathom something, therefore, is to measure its depth with outstretched arms. To explore something with great depth and thought.

To consider the true depths of a problem, with outstretched arms, is a brave yet vulnerable act. To fathom is to
be expectant. It conveys a willingness to see things as they really are. Fathoming also provides helpful boundaries. When we fathom, what can we get our arms around? How do we explore the depths of our lives fathom by fathom?

This book won’t provide you with the secrets to wealth and happiness. Nor does it promise a ten-step plan to success. Our goal for this book is simple: to help you fathom what it looks like to lean into your twenties and flourish here and now in ways that will enable you to continue flourishing well past your twenties. To flourish is to live toward wholeness in your relationships, your work, and your spirit.

This book consists of nine brief chapters and a conclusion. In chapter 1, we explore the lens through which you view life, which enables you to lean faithfully into your twenties: vocation. Understanding vocation will help you make sense of all the big questions and dimensions that characterize your twenties. In chapter 2, we ask you to fathom the two most important questions in life: Who is God? and Who am I? Asking good questions is one of the most powerful tools of discovery you possess. Jesus himself relied on the power of questions in beautiful and masterful ways. Your view of God directly impacts your view of yourself, your life, and your vocation. Your sense of identity drives your sense of calling in powerful ways (both good and bad). In chapter 3, we look at the span of your life, past and present, as well as the spaces and places that comprise it, and how they form you.

In chapter 4, we shift our focus forward, exploring the key dimensions and rhythms of the good life. These are the
aspects of vocation that must be tended to in your pursuit of *shalom*, the Hebrew concept of well-being in all areas of life. Chapter 5 is devoted to the dimension of spirituality and explores how spirituality is (or could be) cultivated in your twenties. Chapter 6 explores the dimension of work in all its glory and gloom. What is work for? How should you look at it as you begin your career? Chapter 7 takes a twentysomething look at family, a complicated dimension as you navigate prospects of marriage and children, your adult role in your family, and much more. Chapter 8 tackles a contentious space for today’s twentysomething: church. What role does, should, or could church play in your twenties and beyond? Chapter 9 considers the dimension of community for twentysomethings and how to approach the tension between contribution and consumption in your neighborhood and beyond.

In the conclusion we’ll review the five dimensions we believe comprise a robust understanding of vocation—spirituality, work, family, church, and community—and consider how we can steward these dimensions for the common good. We’ll also take another look at the idea of shalom and explore ways in which our dimensions of vocation can help others flourish.

Each chapter in the book offers text to read; an interactive, guided section of exercises to help you reflect and discover; and questions to discuss with a friend or in a group. We hope to offer you just enough guidance to make sense of your present life, and enough flexibility to allow for authentic exploration and discovery. While we provide the framework and
guidance, the real work is yours. It’s up to you to embrace discovery with open hands, mind, and heart. To fathom requires deep reflection. Such work takes time. We encourage you to slow down and savor the ideas, questions, and exercises. Don’t rush through the chapters. Speed-reading won’t help you here. Take your time. Read and reread. Stop and think. Write things down. Ponder. Discuss the ideas freely with those who know your hopes and fears. Wander within the pages. The better way to spend your twenties is a focused meander, with frequent stops for contemplation.

As you wander through this book, we hope it will help you fathom things about your life that you’ve always known but now really understand. We also hope it will help you lean into your twenties and find the good life. It may not be exactly the good life you had in mind, or the good life others try to project on you, but it will be a good life marked by shalom. A good life here. A good life now. And a good life beyond your twenties.

With arms outstretched, ready or not, let’s begin.

**EXERCISES**

Your twenties can be an exciting, confusing, and confounding time, with many voices giving you mixed messages.

1. Describe your current twentysomething experience in one word: ____________________

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INTRODUCTION

2 Describe your current twentysomething experience in one sentence: ____________________________
______________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Discussion Questions

1 Share your word and sentence descriptions of your twentysomething experience with a friend or group of people you trust. Why did you choose these words?

2 In this chapter, the twenties were described as a land of in between. Do you agree or disagree? Why, or why not?

3 Your twenties are meant to be full of hope, purpose, and meaning. How would you describe your hopes, purpose, and meaning in this season of life?
Chapter One

Vocation

Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question.

E. E. Cummings

Decisions big and small are portions of our life of pilgrimage, but they are not the destination. Life with God is the destination.

J. Brent Bill, Sacred Compass

Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.

Abraham Lincoln

What are your twenties for? That’s a good question. Why? Because it leads to other deep and beautiful questions worthy of your time and energy.

To answer this question, a good place to start searching for an answer may be to heed the wisdom of Blaise Pascal. A French mathematician, philosopher, and inventor, Pascal was an eccentric genius, the kind Hollywood producers profile in biopics. He was an early innovator of what we now know as the calculator. He also pioneered mathematical work on the binomial triangle and invented the hydraulic press and the syringe. And, on the side, he wrote works on Christian theology and philosophy. His stunning intellect certainly
contributed to his successes in such a short time (he died before turning forty) and in such a diverse number of areas. But that’s only half the story. Pascal was no run-of-the-mill genius. His success as a scientist and philosopher hinged upon his unwavering devotion to exploring the meaning and purpose behind everything, and to do so by asking great questions. Anchoring his experimental work in mathematics, physics, theology, and philosophy was an undying quest to explore the meaning of his own life.

Playwright and politician Václav Havel once suggested that the tragedy of modernity is “not that [we know] less and less about the meaning of . . . life, but that it bothers [us] less and less.”

When we fail to bother, we fail to ask. When we don’t care, we don’t question. So this chapter is devoted to exploring the purpose and meaning of your twenties and encouraging you to embrace some good and beautiful questions in hopes that you’ll arrive at some good and beautiful answers. This is a journey of inquiry not unlike Pascal’s seventeenth-century quest for meaning. Yet more than 350 years after Pascal’s life and work, humankind still doesn’t grasp the power of questions. Think about it. We live in an age where nearly every question imaginable can be asked, and responded to, through the power of Google on our phones. Untold amounts of information are literally at our fingertips (or, more precisely, thumb tips). Yet for all the technological power and innovation available to us, we still struggle to understand the most complex and most beautiful questions of life.
Journalist Warren Berger, who authored an entire book on the power of good questions, wrote, “A journey of inquiry that (hopefully) culminates in change can be a long road, with pitfalls and detours and often nary an answer in sight. . . . The best innovators are able to live with not having the answer right away because they’re focused on just trying to get to the next question.”

This is the power of good and beautiful questions. They don’t always provide easy answers, but they challenge and stretch our thinking. They help us change in important ways. They lead to epiphanies, lightbulb moments that inspire new questions and new ideas. Questions open our minds in ways that answers don’t. They lead to divergent thinking, adventures in our minds that allow us to consider new angles and ideas with courage. Asking questions is also a great equalizer. When we need answers on a particular issue, there’s typically a rigid hierarchy that dispenses knowledge (pastors, scholars, politicians, etc.). But who is barred from asking questions? No one. Anyone can ask questions.

Still, as Berger argued, being able to ask a question and asking a good question are two different things. My (Drew’s) kids illustrate this perpetually. Having five children is to be subjected to a constant barrage of questions about everything, from the mundane to the profound, the holy to the profane. Some of the questions are beautiful. Some make absolutely no sense. Scientists tell us that children hit their peak of question asking at about four years of age. It’s how they make sense of their world. When she was four, my oldest
daughter, Isa, once tugged on my sleeve and asked, “How did the thing go to?”

Try saying that aloud and not laughing! It was a terrible question, so terrible it was funny and kind of adorable. I had no idea what she was talking about.

Isa is ten now and asks much better questions. But she is also asking fewer questions. Something happens after age four. We start relying on the answers we’ve already received more than the questions we might ask. Answers are certainly helpful, but we risk missing something significant when we fail to ask. We journey through life with a false sense of certitude. Or to put it bluntly, we live like self-conscious middle schoolers, shying away from asking questions that make us feel vulnerable, stupid, or silly.

Live the Questions

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke implores us to “live the questions now.” But to do so is more than an intellectual pursuit. It’s an embodied exploration that requires our entire being, here and now. This is how you should approach your twenties.

Good and beautiful questions lived well are lived with others. It’s important to surround yourself with people you know and trust to treat your hopes and fears with the best of intentions.

The Quaker tradition has a long-standing practice that illustrates this beautifully. It’s called a clearness committee, a
communal approach to discernment in which trusted members of the community gather around an individual who has a particular challenge, problem, or question. When gathered, members follow one rule: You are allowed to speak using only open, honest questions. Clearness committees don’t employ interrogations or verbal suggestion boxes. They seek to honor the discovery-and-discernment process, free of personal agendas.

Why questions and not answers? Answers would be easier to give and more efficient, right?

To appreciate the true value of a question over an answer, consider Jesus of Nazareth, the most powerful teacher ever to walk this earth. His words, recorded in the Bible, are the most read words in the history of the world. And his preferred method of teaching? Asking questions, often to the annoyance and confusion of his disciples. In fact, Jesus asked more than three hundred questions in the Bible. Look it up and count if you like (or just trust us). The Bible also records more than one hundred times when individuals or groups asked Jesus a question. Can you guess how many times he responded with a direct answer?

Three.

That’s it. Three.

Nearly every time, Jesus responded to a question with a better, deeper question. It’s because questions, at their core, are an adventure. Consider the root word *quest* embedded at the beginning of the word *question*. Questions send us on a journey of discovery in ways that answers don’t.
So when you authentically ask yourself, *What are my twenties for, anyway?* a good and beautiful question emerges. *What is my calling?*

It’s a loaded question, rife with presumption and pressure. But it’s a very good one. As we ponder this question in the chapters that follow, we’ll consider a particular lens through which to explore the depths and potential of your twenties. That lens is *vocation*—a familiar word that’s often misunderstood.

Vocation is a concept with powerful theological roots, yet it’s frequently used in very nontheological ways. Ask ten people to define it, and there’s a good chance you’ll receive ten different answers.

The word *vocation* is synonymous with calling. Derived from the Latin word *vocare* (“to call”), vocation assumes that there is a caller (God). Another closely related word is *vox*, Latin for “voice.” God speaks to us, and we receive the call, allowing his words to guide us. Vocation is an active process of living faithfully in response to God’s call for the whole of our lives.

Many familiar with the term might quote the American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner, who beautifully wrote that “vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”4 A stunning statement, isn’t it? Worthy of a good cup of coffee and some time to ponder. But where do gladness and need intersect? Is there some sort of grid where we can plot our gladness on one axis and world need on the other?
Or consider another articulation from Quaker writer and educator Parker Palmer: “Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, . . . I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity.” Absolutely. We must understand who we are, and we must be listening. But how do we go about mining these truths and values at the heart of our being? How do we know we’re listening to the true stuff, and not just the things we want to hear?

David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, offers a more pragmatic approach to vocation: “In Christian tradition, vocation is a biblically robust, directive sense of God’s calling, both individually and collectively. Vocation is a clear mental picture of our role as Christ-followers in the world, of what we were put on earth to do as individuals and as a community.” We come alive when we feel that the things we’re doing are what we were destined to do. But often our mental images of our current roles in the world feel less clear, more foggy. How do we achieve clarity?

Jess and I love author Steven Garber’s eloquent description of vocation, which seems to weave aspects of all these definitions into his own: “The word vocation is a rich one, having to address the wholeness of life, the range of relationships and responsibilities. Work, yes, but also families, and neighbors, and citizenship, locally and globally—all of this and more is seen as vocation, that to which I am called as a human being, living my life before the face of God.” This is a stunning wall-sized-mural vision of vocation. Sweeping and holistic, it covers everything. But to someone in the thick
of an important decision, questions remain. So where do we start? What’s step one?

Informed by these bright minds, we want to offer our own definition for your twenties:

Vocation is the pursuit of a life lived faithfully with God that includes the many dimensions of the good life.

The temptation is to view our callings as far-off, idyllic destinations to arrive at, where we plant our flags, stake our claims, and live triumphantly and purposefully. But vocation, as Jess and I see it, is an ongoing process of faithful living.

J. Brent Bill wrote, “Decisions big and small are portions of our life of pilgrimage, but they are not the destination. Life with God is the destination.” The richness of vocation is that it requires hearts and lives attuned and responsive to God in all dimensions of life. Vocation is life with God. Thus, a proper understanding of vocation requires us to be fully present and fully prepared—fully present to what God has called us to here and now, and fully prepared for what he may be calling us to next.

When we consider the very things to which we feel a sense of calling in our lives, we can easily compile a substantial list. Garber is right. Vocation is work. But it’s also so much more. The many dimensions of our lives include not only our work but our spirituality, our families, our churches, and our
communities as well. Sometimes these dimensions of vocation overlap, and sometimes they don’t. An understanding of vocation evokes a deep sense of responsibility to live faithfully in all sectors and seasons of our lives. Within the range of our relationships and responsibilities in this broken world, vocation is often not as clear as we would like it to be. And even when it is clear, it’s often not as easy to live out as we had hoped.

Vocation, when understood within a proper theology of God, however, is a beautiful reminder of his work in the world through us, a connection of humans to God’s larger story and the hope to which we have been called (see Ephesians 1:18). Vocation requires an active response on the part of the hearers (us) to God, but it’s less about striving and more about a way of living. It encompasses not only a *general call* to know God and work toward restoration in all sectors of our world but also a *specific call* to know and use our individual gifts and talents within our differing contexts and experiences.

Vocation involves the living out of faith between Genesis 1–2 (what God intended) and Revelation 21–22 (what he has promised). It is the work of both the church and individuals, requiring our active participation in all dimensions of life (spirituality, work, family, church, and community). But we can easily get tripped up over the idea of being called. If it covers every dimension of life, the sheer magnitude of the concept can feel overwhelming. Anxiety can take over, leading to paralysis in decision making. We then embrace fear instead of freedom.
Another common response is to reduce vocation to a more manageable size—something we can easily wrap our minds around. The problem here is that we don’t live compartmentalized lives (at least not well). Vocation cannot be reduced to simply work. What if your company goes bankrupt? Vocation cannot be reduced to simply family. What if, God forbid, tragedy strikes, and you lose your family? And what about other dimensions of life, such as church and community? Vocation is wide and deep enough to help us understand how we are implicated (responsible) in the dimensions of our lives.

We often view passion as the most important factor in discerning our calling. That is, if we’re not passionate about something, it’s not important. While passion can be helpful, over time it can be a tricky barometer. We know we’re called to do some things, but we don’t always feel passionate about them (such as flossing our teeth, helping kids with homework, eating our vegetables).

There are days when my (Drew’s) mood affects my passion toward something. When thought of this way, passion begins to look a lot more like a fleeting, purely emotional response. Emotion is important but is best evaluated in concert with all our other faculties (motivation, cognition, etc.). Pure passion often leads to losing sight of the fact that we live in a fallen, broken world. Despite our passion, the toil of the mundane perpetually lurks around the corner of our lives, causing us to question why we’re doing what we’re doing at all and long for something else. I have a friend who is known...
for saying, “They call it work for a reason.” Hyperbole perhaps, but also truth. Our lives can’t always be full of the most amazing, rewarding, fulfilling, passionate experiences.

In short, discerning our calling is a messy endeavor. Fortunately, it truly is a step-by-step process, not a destination. It’s to be lived in the present with a watchful eye on the future. There’s an already-but-not-yet aspect to vocation in your twenties that can be liberating or stupefying. You’re already called to many good things now, just as you’re being called to many good things in the future.

The good life is to be had—and pursued—now. Vocation is about living out the Kingdom of God in the here and now. This kingdom is the ultimate already-but-not-yet force in our lives. When Jess and I talk about vocation throughout this book, this is what we mean. It’s a perspective-driven approach, not a speed-driven approach. Rather than racing to figure out your life as quickly as you can, we encourage you to spend time deeply exploring how to live faithfully now so you can continue to do so later.

While it’s true that vocation can often be overwhelming and messy, it can also be amazingly simple. Often, it means waking up each day and taking one restorative step forward in your relationships with others, as well as in your work, your church, your community, and, ultimately, your relationship with God. This restorative step moves you toward the overarching goal for vocation: shalom.

Shalom is an ancient, vibrant idea that is insufficiently translated “peace” in English. It is peace, but it’s so much
more. A better description would be the collective *flourishing* of God’s creation. This includes flourishing in our relationships with one another, with God, and with his creation. It’s something to practice now in hopeful anticipation of its complete fulfillment one day. Shalom is the essence of the good life in which each of us flourishes, and our flourishing contributes to the shalom of those around us. Step by step in our pursuit of shalom, we set faithful trajectories for the good and faithful life.

Vocation truly is an overwhelming pursuit, but in an arrestingly beautiful way. It covers everything, giving us a sense of what is and what could be. But it doesn’t have to lead to despair, or frustration, or anxiety. It can fill you with hope, purpose, and meaning. Put another way, we want you to truly fathom shalom in and for your life.

**EXERCISES**

In the chapter, *vocation* is defined as “the pursuit of a life lived faithfully with God that includes the many dimensions of the good life.”

1. What do you consider to be the essential elements of the good life?
2 Based on what you’ve written, draft a one- or two-sentence vision of the good life. Copy it on a postcard or piece of paper that you can use as a bookmark. (We’ll ask you to refer to this vision statement periodically throughout the book.)

The good life is . . .

3 As Annie Dillard famously quipped, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” Conduct a time audit, tracking how you spend a typical twenty-four-hour day and documenting everything you do in thirty-minute increments in the following chart.

Twenty-Four-Hour Time Audit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00 a.m.</td>
<td>10:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>10:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>11:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>11:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>12:00 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>12:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>1:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>1:30</td>
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</table>
4 A twenty-four-hour audit may not always provide the best sampling of your life, but it can offer glimpses of insight. Compare your responses on the elements of the good life and your vision of the good life with your twenty-four-hour time audit. Where do you find evidence of the good life in your day? Write down any observations:

5 Where is there dissonance between your vision of the good life and your day?

6 Think beyond one day to the broader strokes on the canvas that is your twenties. Which areas of your life are flourishing now? Which areas are more ambiguous?
Areas that are flourishing:


Areas that are ambiguous:


Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of our definition of *vocation* as “the pursuit of a life lived faithfully with God that includes the many dimensions of the good life?”

2. To what extent do you let passion rule your decisions? Do you agree or disagree with the view that passion
alone is a tricky barometer of vocation? What other tools should be used to discern calling?

3 Where do you see shalom in others? Share evidence you’ve seen of shalom in the lives of those you know.

4 Do you agree that how we spend our days is truly how we spend our lives? Why or why not?

5 What does a hopeful vision of flourishing look like for you? For your group?