

ROUTINES



VIVA!

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ROUTINES

WEEK ONE: PLANNING AHEAD



VIVA!

OBJECTIVE

In this Viva! Series, we'll be taking a look at how our routines shape us, especially if we haven't learned to shape our routines with intentionality. Not all routine is good, nor is all routine bad. The trick is to know the difference.

Planning isn't necessarily a word you hear much from middle or high school youth, apart from the occasional, "I was planning to sleep in." But the truth is that their schedules are very much planned in advance—whether by intention or neglect, our lives fill to the brim with *stuff to do*.

ACTIVITY

Connect 4™

Say: We're about to play Connect 4™, but we're taking the rules up a notch.

Divide your group into pairs (you get to play if your group has an odd number). Allow each pair to go head to head over a game of Connect 4™, but instead of trying to get 4 pieces in a row, they're simply trying to get *more* pieces in the game than their opponent. To be clear—there's no taking turns here. There's plenty of room in the grid for all of the game pieces, so each round will be played on a 10 second timer. If your group proves to be remarkably adept at game piece slinging, shorten the time to make it a challenge. When time is up, the youth with less is out and the youth with more moves on to another winning partner.

Play to a single winner. You can obviously repeat this at the end if you've got time. If you can't find a Connect 4™ game, an easy variation would be to do something similar with a checkerboard—whoever *neatly* places more of their pieces in the time allowed moves on.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The game Connect 4™ or a set of checkers
- Paper
- Markers
- Bibles

DISCUSSION

Does the way we just played that game remind you of any aspect of your life? Where do you feel most hurried? Where do you feel like you can relax?

The reality is that your lives are so busy that if you don't choose what things will fill your time, things seem to fill it for you. Beside your own interests, what other things compete with you to fill your schedule?

There's a passage in Ephesians that does a good job of exploring the difficult balance of what we're called to as Christians and the things that distract us. As we read, we need to pay attention to both of those things. We need three volunteers: one to read, one to write the Christian aspirations mentioned, and one to write the things we're

meant to avoid. Have the lists titled, “Don’t” and “Should.”

Instruct your reading volunteer to read slowly enough that the list-makers can keep up. When they’ve finished reading, allow the group to mention anything missing from either list.

Say: It’s easy to become desensitized to the things on the “don’t” list. How many of the things on that list do you encounter in an average week? What about on the “we should” list?

Which seem to come more naturally? Why do you think that is?

What does it take for the things on the “should” list to become part of your routine?

RESPONSE

Talk through an average week for your group. What things present opportunities for the things on either list to be engaged? When the opportunities on the “don’t” list appear, what action can they take to not only avoid it, but to actually respond with something from the “should” list?

We’re talking about routine for the next few weeks. When we played Connect 4 earlier, it gave us a kind of visualization of what it can look like for our schedule to become compromised if we’re not quick enough to manage it ourselves. Let’s go back through the “should” list one more time—what are some real ways that you can plan to do those things during the week? On the “don’t” list, are there known problem areas where you can plan in advance to avoid them?

Next week we’ll be talking about a spiritual fundamental—prayer. It’s a critical part of our Christian life, but it’s easily overlooked if we let it slip from our routine.

Close in prayer.

ROUTINES

WEEK TWO: PRAYER



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OBJECTIVE

In this Viva! Series, we're talking about both the good and the bad in having routines in our lives. Sometimes routine can enhance our spiritual lives, while other times it can seem to block our progress.

Here in week 2, we're examining one of the fundamentals of a spiritually centered life—prayer. Youth struggle at times with prayer. How do we pray? What does prayer *do*? What *doesn't* it do? Establishing a routine of prayer is a great way to explore those and other questions about it.

ACTIVITY

Say something like: Today we're talking about prayer. Prayer, defined simply, is the means by which we communicate ourselves to God—our fears, desires, doubts, joys, and concerns. In our daily lives we currently have a nearly absurd number of ways of communicating with each other—in fact, let's try to name them all.

Spend a few minutes creating a list of all the ways they communicate themselves to the world around them. It doesn't have to be two-way communication. Art, as an example, allows us to express things without any intention of anyone *responding* to us.

Many—if not most—of the things they put on the list will be digital forms of communication, especially social media. Go through the list and try to come up with what their main use is for each. What is their primary expression in each form of communication? At the same time, try to find one thing for each form that they would *never* try to express through it. Breaking up via Instagram would probably be poorly received. Conveying deep feelings is probably best done in an actual conversation. Unless you have high social anxiety, then maybe a thoughtfully written note is how you would do that.

Finally, have your group decide which means of communication they would use to:

- ...reveal an embarrassing failure
- ...apologize when they were in the wrong
- ...offer support to someone struggling with a loss
- ...ask for help

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bibles
- Paper
- Markers

. DISCUSSION

Pass out paper and markers, and tell your group to draw a clock face without hands on it. When they're done, ask: What time of day are you most likely to pray? Draw hands on the clock to indicate when that is. If you've got a couple of times in mind, draw a second set of hands in a different color.

Here's some quick background on the text we're about to read:

Israel, the nation known as "God's people" in the Old Testament, is finished. The kingdom first split in two, then the two parts were conquered—the northern kingdom of Israel by Assyria, and the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. The best and brightest of Judah were taken into captivity in Babylon. Hard times.

It's there that we meet Daniel, still devoted to his God despite all that has happened. King Darius—of Babylon—thinks Daniel is pretty great and promotes him in Babylon's leadership. Not everybody loves this, which is where our story picks up.

Have a volunteer read Daniel 6:1-10.

So everybody ganged up on the new kid. The leadership of the Babylonians couldn't find any real fault with Daniel, but wanted him gone anyway. They realized that his devotion to God was his only "weakness," so to speak. They leveraged King Darius' vanity and enacted a 30-day only-pray-to-Darius edict. Daniel knew that it had been signed, but said, "Whatevs" and continued his habit of praying three times a day.

If you're unfamiliar with this story, the Bible indicates that Daniel was then thrown into a lion's den for a sleepover. But it was cool. God protected him.

It's important to notice that we don't see some drawn out decision-making process on Daniel's part about whether or not to maybe take a God-break for a month to accommodate the temporary rule. Daniel's routine of prayer was so firmly established that it doesn't appear to cross his mind to stop.

RESPONSE

What is your habit of prayer? When do you do it? What happens when you pray?

What would you have done if you were in Daniel's shoes?

At the beginning, we talked about all the different ways we can communicate with each other. Are there other ways besides just talking to God that you consider to be prayerful?

Prayer is one of the ways we feel we can come into direct contact with God, which should make it pretty important to us. When have you been successful in keeping prayer in your daily routine? What has worked for you? When have you struggled?

Is there a way this group can support each other in developing a routine for prayer?

As you close, have your group think through some ways of finding solidarity in prayer even when they're apart. Even if it's just one time one day a week, an agreement to hold each other in prayer can help them develop prayer as a routine

ROUTINES

WEEK THREE: PREPARATION



VIVA!

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In the last session we talked about making prayer a foundational routine in our lives. This session focuses on preparation. Being intentional in our spiritual *preparation* sets us up for success in deepening our relationship with God and each other.

ACTIVITY

Have your group choose a life achievement they'd like to accomplish before finishing high school. It can be anything, but ideally it will be something that feels like real success—not just something silly. Straight As, earning a college scholarship, some level of fitness, or anything *achievable*—but something that takes some work.

It doesn't have to be school related; you get the idea. Once they've agreed on a goal, begin an infinite regression exercise: what do you have to do to prepare yourself for that? Try to have them find whatever step is directly before the goal. If winning the state championship in team checkers is the goal, they'll need to have won a playoff match to get to the championship round. What did they have to do to prepare for the playoff match? Probably a very successful team checkers season. Your goal in the exercise is to have them effectively walk *backwards* step by step from their goal to sitting here in your group.

Ask: Have you ever actually gone after a goal with this kind of thought process?

Try the activity again. This time, pick out a more spiritual goal. Where would they like to be in their relationship with God before graduating high school? What would they like to understand better about God or scripture? Do they have any goals for mission work? They can choose either an individual goal or a goal for your group. Once they've picked a goal together, begin with the "What prepares us for *that*?" regression. This time, have them write down the steps.

When they've regressed back to the room you're in, ask them: Are you willing to take the first step toward that goal?

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bibles
- Paper
- Pens

DISCUSSION

Even for adults, the idea of making and working toward a spiritual goal probably requires a different mindset than we usually have. In what activities or goals are you already engaged in making preparation for whatever steps are next?

In Exodus 16, we join the Israelites after they've escaped slavery in Egypt. While they're grateful to be free, it doesn't take them long to get on the grumble bus. Have a volunteer read Exodus 16:2-5.

Food and water are real needs, obviously. Preparation and provision go hand in hand a lot of times—as we move through life and faith, we have the opportunity to utilize what's right in front of us to grow and thrive.

Israel now had provision for food. It's interesting that they're given *just enough*. In the verses that follow, it's revealed that—with the exception of the 6th day—if they try to keep the bread for more than a day, it will rot. Fill with maggots, actually. What does this “just enough” provision tell you about how God intends for us to live?

(If you have time at the end, read verses 6-20 as well. Israel might be on the grumble bus, but Moses is driving. Have your group pay attention to how many times Moses sounds a little grouchy in these verses.)

Verse four indicates that God is testing Israel, to see whether they'll follow instruction. How does following the leading of God best prepare us for the future?

RESPONSE

The concept of a routine of preparation is probably most obvious in verse 5. Have someone read that verse again.

Ask: Why would they need to gather twice as much on the 6th day? (If they don't land on Sabbath on their own, read verse 23-30.) What does that adjustment in God's provision tell us about the importance of Sabbath? (Spoiler alert: the next session is about Sabbath.)

Our opportunities to turn provision into preparation for the future probably aren't as obvious as bread lying on the ground every morning. What opportunities to make preparation for the future a routine in your life? Where do you see provision in your life?

How could a routine of preparation make your life better—or even *easier*, for that matter? What would a routine of preparation for spiritual growth look like in your day-to-day schedule?

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WEEK FOUR: SABBATH



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This session focuses on Sabbath. When we talk about the negative impact routines can have in our lives, the routine of *neglecting* Sabbath can be one of the hardest to overcome. We have to be intentional to establish positive routines so that the negative ones don't take over.

ACTIVITY

Say: New group rule! From now on, we start our time together with 5 minutes of absolute silence and stillness, which we will call The Floor of Quietude. It's for your own good.

Have everyone spread out and lie down on their backs. Solemnly announce the beginning of The Floor of Quietude. If anyone moves or makes noise, sternly say, "Quietude!" Wait 5 full minutes in silence, then allow everyone to return to their seats. If you've got time, consider restarting the clock if someone moves or makes noise.

Because this is your first time participating in The Floor of Quietude, it's probably a good idea to debrief the experience. Ask for feedback: What did you enjoy about The Floor of Quietude? It only exists for your benefit; a time of reflective rest is good for the soul. Is there anything you can think of that might improve our experience of The Floor of Quietude going forward?

We're talking about Sabbath today. Have your group work to come up with a working definition of Sabbath as a reference point for conversation for the rest of this group time. Write it on a poster board and place it somewhere visible to everyone.

Things to consider while working toward a definition: *What* is Sabbath? *Why* do we observe it? *How* do we participate in it? Is there a right or wrong way to observe it?

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bibles
- Poster board
- Marker

DISCUSSION

What's the weirdest rule you've ever heard of? (Consider doing an internet search for blue laws—old, outdated laws that remain on the books simply because they haven't been removed.)

Before we read today's text, you need to understand something. Jesus was continually running into opposition for how he and his disciples lived their lives. The Pharisees get a lot of bad press from Christians, but they were just trying to preserve the heart of Jewish culture, which was *how they lived their lives*. They had hundreds—*hun-*

dreds—of laws in their scripture to guide everything from behavior to cleanliness. So a lot of their apparent beef with Jesus was really just asking, “But hey, what about the rules?”

Sabbath was particularly wrapped in rules, meant to ensure that even the appearance of work was avoided. Let’s read about how tight the rules were—someone read Mark 2:23-28 for us.

Tiny nibbles. This was the offense called out by the Pharisees. “How dare your disciples take tiny nibbles on the Sabbath!” (...roughly.) Jesus, rather than just suggesting the Pharisees lighten up, points to a time when King David (our Old Testament’s best king ever) broke the rules in a major way when hungry. They walked right into the house of God (not a great idea) and ate the bread that only the priests were allowed to eat (probably a worse idea).

Then Jesus drops the trump card—Sabbath exists for us, not the other way around. He wasn’t diminishing the importance of Sabbath, he just wasn’t going to be ruled by it.

RESPONSE

For the Pharisees, their routine around Sabbath (and a lot of other things) had become about fulfilling rules, rather than being fulfilled by its practice. What does it mean for the Sabbath to exist *for* us?

The practice of Sabbath has become a bit foreign in our go-go-go schedules. What routines regularly compromise your ability to find time to rest and reflect?

How does a routine that incorporates Sabbath show honor to God?

Working from our definition we created earlier, how well do we do individually fulfilling Sabbath in our lives? Are there ways that we can better observe Sabbath as a group?

Looking back over our last few times together, how have your routines begun to change? What new ways have you discovered to overcome negative routines with positive ones?

Pray to close this time together, asking God to meet us in all of our routines, transforming us into the people we’re created to be.