

EPISODE 040 - LIVING INTENTIONALLY IN A DISTRACTED WORLD WITH LARA CASEY ISAACSON WITH NANCY RAY

Intro

The word “intentional” has become kind of a buzzword these last few years. I’ve seen it everywhere on social media and with good reason. Being intentional is the opposite of living haphazardly or living distracted, which is all too easy to do today.

Today I’m going to be chatting with my friend, Lara Casey Isaacson, two-time author and owner of Cultivate What Matters and the creator of the PowerSheets. And we’re going to be talking all about what it looks like to live intentionally in a distracted world and how setting goals can help us do just that.

You’re listening to Work and Play with Nancy Ray, Episode 40.

Much of our daily lives can be divided into two categories, work and play. Simply put, that is where our life and our legacy take place. This is a podcast all about learning to work and play well, which leads to a healthy soul and a fulfilling life.

Let’s dive in.

Content

Nancy Ray:

Lara, I am so excited to have you on the Work and Play Podcast. Welcome.

Lara Casey:

Thank you. This is a treat. It’s like we are real life great friends, and now we get to do some fun podcasty-partyiness together. So I’m really excited.

Nancy Ray:

So much fun. I know. I feel like the only way to start off this podcast is by telling people where I was when Grace was born.

Lara Casey:

Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. Yes, enlighten us. Let's just go there.

Nancy Ray:

Just in case people weren't sure we are friends, where was I?

Lara Casey:

Just in case you're not sure of the depth of our friendship. So sweet. Nancy Ray has been there for the birth of both of my red-headed children and has photographed all the milestones in between. And when Sarah came home after we adopted her, everything. But the most notable photography experience was Grace's birth where she was there to photograph and was of course, as you are Nancy, just one of the biggest faith encouragements to me ever. And then the nurse leans over and says, "How good of friends are you," to Nancy as I am in high labor, dilated to an eight, whatever it is.

Nancy Ray:

Oh yeah.

Lara Casey:

I'm not sure you got a chance to answer. She just said, "Grab her leg." And so Nancy was holding my leg as Grace came into the world. So we are friends.

Nancy Ray:

We're close. I was holding one leg, your leg in one arm, and then my camera and the other. And that's how it happened. But we became very close that day. Seriously, still one of the most special days ever.

Lara Casey:

Makes me really happy. It's the best.

Nancy Ray:

I know. So sweet. But anyway, I'm so glad that you're here. The title of this, I was thinking, man, there are about a million of things I would like to talk to you about, Lara. I feel like we do have a history, and there's so many different directions we could go. But I think about your life, and I think people look at you and think of you as living great intentionally. And that's a choice you have to make in the hard things. That's why I came up with the title Living Intentionally In A Distracted World, because it is easy to be distracted. It's really easy to be distracted, and you have to put guardrails in place and kind of a life system in place to not be distracted. Because if you don't, man, those distractions are just going to take over.

Nancy Ray:

So I wanted to ask you what experiences in your life were like a wake up call for you to focus on what is important?

Lara Casey:

There was a day that I, as a wedding planner... So long story, but as Nancy knows, I was a wedding planner and was in the beginning years of Southern Weddings. I was doing both of those at the same time, and I had a high profile client call me in church on Sunday. Of course, I had my phone visible, and I stepped out of church to answer that call. And that, among many other things, very similar experiences were wake up calls for me to say, "What in the world am I putting my trust in? What is really important to me?" Of course, I think the thing we experience as humans when we let distractions or when we let things that are really not important, when our priorities get misaligned and disordered is we feel it. We physically and physiologically, we feel it. The effects of stress and cortisol and like all the things, it makes us sleepless. I mean, I'm not saying anything anybody doesn't know or experience.

But that type of experience was pretty constant for me in those early days of my business because I was trying to find my worth in my work. And it's such a funny thing to think I was in church where I should be finding my worth in God, but my faith was just so small back then. I'll probably say that 20 years from now about this season, too. But those experiences of coming face to face with, "Oh my goodness. I just made a choice that didn't feel right." That was a wake up call.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah. I remember you telling that story and I love that story because there is this biological reaction that happens in our body. When you have that phone in your hand and you're talking to a client outside of church, and you're like, "What is happen..." You started to feel icky from head to toe. And I think that's God's goodness to us. There's like a check in our spirit when there's something that's just not right, and that's a gift. That's a good thing. But yeah, it's important to listen to those things.

Lara Casey:

It's like a dissonance. It's like a you hear a song or a symphony, and there's this one violin that just doesn't have it together. It's like a disharmony that you're hearing in the song of your life. So yeah.

Nancy Ray:

What are your biggest distractions, Lara? On a day to day basis, what do you... Because we all think... I mean, I think of you as someone who has laser focus, not distractable. But you're a person. So I know that you have distractions, and I just am curious what are those for you?

Lara Casey:

I think that this is probably a gross generalization, but I think someone's faith can be proportionate to how much they need God. And for me, I really need him, and I see that in the amount of things that I get distracted by. I have to have boundaries in my life because I think my biggest idol in life would be pride, approval of people, and there are a million ways for me to seek that. That could be through scrolling on Instagram or constantly looking at the likes that I am getting or not. And it's kind of a subconscious thing that happens at this point. I'm not actively saying, "My goal is to get 500 likes on this post." It is something that has seeped

into the fabric of my brain patterns I could say. So I think that my biggest distraction is probably conflict in relationship when it comes to wanting people to like me more than wanting to be obedient to the Lord and my calling and what I'm supposed to do. And pride in wanting... It's kind of the same thing. I think my biggest distraction is trying to be liked rather than resting in God's love for me right where I am.

Nancy Ray:

Yup. This is so great that you just said that. First of all, thank you because I'm right there with you. I think most people probably are. But there's a sign that I have right in front of me, and I think it's the message translation of 2 Corinthians 10:18 that says, "What you say about yourself means nothing in God's work. It's what God says about you that makes all the difference." And I love that, and I have it up here right in front of my podcast because it's easy to get so caught up in what other people think, what other people want from you, what people don't like about, what they like about you. And that don't matter. It just matters what God thinks. That makes all the difference. It's just easy to be distracted by everything else.

Lara Casey:

So true.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah. It's a reminder I think that we all need-

Lara Casey:

I need that.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah. Me too. That's why I have it in front of me all the time.

Lara Casey:

The thing is this society and even if we were just to pinpoint the one platform of Instagram, and social media gets a bad rap. It's not a bad thing when you use it well. But if you just look at the platform of Instagram, it is built for us to compare our lives to other people. That is literally the reason it exists because they have built in the likes and the comments and the analytics and all those things to be able to measure all those things. You can't help but when you open up your Instagram app and look at your own profile to see all the numbers. The first thing that pops up is the amount of likes. So it's almost like this whole the system is rigged. Spoiler alert: the system is rigged. So if you're feeling comparison; if you're feeling the distractions, it's because there's some really smart marketers back there that they want to pull you into that. I'm just putting a piece of compassion out there for all of us that it's understandable why we get distracted, and because of that, because these things are such a lure to us, we have to fight doubly hard against them.

Nancy Ray:

For sure. And if you are listening and you haven't listened to my episode on Three Habits To Put Social Media In Its Place, I actually dig into the research that goes behind how it actually is rigged. The infinite scroll was something that was actually invented to make us feel like we never hit the bottom of a webpage and we just keep going. And the like button was invented to get that hit of like, "Hey, this is awesome." It keeps you coming back. So I'll leave that episode in the show notes if you haven't listened to it and you want to go back and listen to it.

Nancy Ray:

But yeah, I think it's good to realize that and to pay attention to this is how it was designed. But then to also say, "I can run my life. I can put things in place to where I'm not distracted by this all the time. I can put up these guardrails or boundaries for myself so I can live a life that I want to live." So what are some simple habits that you do every day just to keep you focused on living intentionally?

Lara Casey:

It's such great timing. We were just talking about this as a team this morning, and we were talking about our goals for 2020 and talking about the things that haven't worked this year. And I think we can all relate to having too much to do and not enough time to do it. And it's like probably a struggle that we're going to all have for the rest of our lives because that's one of the opportunities that we have to lay before the Lord what we've been tasked with and say, "God, help me to say no and be humble," and all those things. But one thing we talked about was how we all desire margin for the meaningful, margin to be able to connect deeply with each other and with our community in order to plant seeds of faith in, like I said, each other and the people that we interact with on a daily basis in our business. And yet, in the middle of us talking about that, I heard ding, ding. I was like, "Oh my goodness." So to me, one of the biggest things that we can do to put up guardrails and to give ourselves the gift of margin for the meaningful is to turn off the notifications.

Lara Casey:

I'm sure that there's tons of research out there that talks about how our brains just instantly split the moment those little notification things flash across our screen and all the dings and all the things. And we really train ourselves to be in that system, whatever it is for us, and it breaks our attention span. And I know that there's research out there about how I think it takes 20 minutes to get into a long form project. So imagine you're trying to work on something intently or perhaps even complete a photo album for your kids or whatever it is, and yet you're allowing those text message or SMS or Instagram, whatever to pop in every five seconds. That things going to take you about, I don't know, 18 times longer than you thought it would. So I think that's a simple, practical way that we can say no to the distractions and to say yes to guarding our time and guarding our hearts is turn off the dings.

Nancy Ray:

For sure. And it's so funny because you and I have been talking about that kind of conversation in setting those boundaries for 10 years maybe, since we've been friends. And we talk about it a lot at Making Things Happen, and we live in that. But how revolutionary it was

for me the first time that I actually took off mail notifications on my phone. I haven't done that in years. But I think that's such a good point to go back to that because I don't get Instagram notifications. I don't get mail notifications. Most of the time my phone's on silent or in another room, and I've gotten used to living a life that way. But the truth is that I think most people still don't, and they have Instagram notifications or mail notifications or whatever. And it's just like you don't need them. You are in control of your phone. You're in control of all of those distractions. You can just kind of turn the volume down on those things and be present with whatever it is and whoever it is that's right in front of you, which is so important. Man, what was that phrase? Margin for the meaningful. Is that what you said?

Lara Casey:
Yup.

Nancy Ray:
That is like, man, I want to frame that. That's something that you have to... I mean, you have to fight for that. But that margin for the meaningful is where life happens. That's the good stuff of life, and man, that just... I don't know. That's going to be ringing in my head I think for a couple of days, which is a good thing.

Lara Casey:
And I feel like the hard truth is that, and the freeing truth, it's a good thing, is that we get to choose. And change is hard. I'm sure some of you that are listening are thinking, as I was thinking when I was faced with all those notifications in my own life—I still get faced with them sometimes. But thinking to myself, "Oh, I can't do that. That's too hard. I'm going to miss something," or, "No, no, no, no. No. I have to know when this specific person emails me." I totally get that. There are some things like your child's daycare that you need to have on speed dial with a neon light above your phone. But really we get to choose. And I think that that truth has not suck in for us. We tend to feel like we're victims of our own schedules and victims of this society that has all these notifications. It's not just notifications. But we do. We get to choose a different operating system all together.

So alternatively to having all the notifications up there, maybe you're feeling fear about missing things or not getting to things quickly enough. You could choose to have a system where you only check in on those things once an hour. Just start there. Imagine the thing that tends to propel me to change and propels a lot of people to change is to imagine the positive results of that change kind of tends to push you through the hard part of change. But imagine how much time you're going to get back, and I think even just this morning for our team, thinking about how important, how eternally important that margin is for connection, that will allow you to sacrifice the fear of missing out on things.

Nancy Ray:
Yeah. 100%, and I think painting that picture and getting that vision in front of you is the thing that's going to keep you going. It's important to not live in fear about it because I fear for my kids. I don't know if you feel like this. But I think about the screens.

Lara Casey:
Yes, I do. I join you in that.

Nancy Ray:
The screens, the addiction. I mean, it's a different world that they're growing up in. A vastly different world that they're growing up in than even our parents grew up in. It's wild to think about. Yeah, I think getting that picture in front of your head is huge. So thinking about that, thinking about our kids and this generation that we are raising, what do you think is the biggest distractions that that generation is going to have to face or wake up to and fight against or really plan for? If our kids are 15 and listening to this episode one day, which is crazy to think about because that could actually happen, what are the things that they're really going to have to wrestle with and fight for in this world of technology and distraction?

Lara Casey:
Well first of all, hi kids. You're not so little anymore.

Nancy Ray:
We love you.

Lara Casey:
We love you. Love our younger selves. As I was thinking about that, I think that the biggest thing that they're going to be faced with, which I was not faced with when I came out of college, for instance, was so much opportunity for comparison, and a culture as a whole is usually built on people seeing the other person do something a certain way. So they start to mirror each other, and so for me when I graduated from college, there was no social media. Facebook I don't think even existed. Maybe it was at the stage where the Harvard folks were just doing it at Harvard or whatever the story was, and it wasn't a public thing. But I didn't have that. And I was just talking to Kaylee in my office, and she was saying how difficult it is as someone who is in that 23 to 24 age range as a Millennial to come out of college and have gone through college with so much availability for comparison with the internet. And so I think I really think that's going to be the hardest thing. I mean, Lord willing, it won't. Who knows what God will do between now and then, but that is the biggest thing.

Lara Casey:
So protecting our children but also training them to be able to combat that and know their identity in Christ and to listen to the voice that actually matters, it's going to be of paramount importance compared to my generation.

Nancy Ray:
Yeah. I totally agree. I've been observing Gen Z, which is the next generation coming up after Millennials, and one of the things I've been seeing I think is they're actually, from what I've observed. This could be totally false. This is just me. This is just Nancy talking, no research. But I'm almost seeing a shift of people, these young people not wanting to be on their phones as much, which I'm thankful for. But I think they're kind of annoyed with it and are realizing that the in face, person-to-person connection is better. And of course they're still on Snapchat, of course

they're still doing the phone thing and the social media thing.

But I went to an engagement party. My little brother got engaged. He proposed to his girlfriend a few months ago, and I looked all around. And nobody had their phones out. Nobody was Instagramming or posting. Maybe I just didn't see it, but this house was full of about 50 people who are in college right now. And nobody had their phones out posting about it. I mean, there were some pictures being taken later on. But it felt different, and I start to wonder if there's going to be almost like desire for connection, for real connection that starts to well up in the next generation where they're kind of like not as into it. They're not as into it. Now I hope that happens, I don't know. Again, this is just my observation thinking I'm Instagramming more than anybody else here. That was weird. These kids are young and in college. I felt like, "Okay. What's happening here?"

But I don't know. I'm thinking, I'm hoping there is a shift that could happen. That's a total tangent.

Lara Casey:

I'll take that. I'll take that hope. I like that hope.

Nancy Ray:

Kids, if you're listening, embrace that.

Lara Casey:

Embrace that. It's going to happen, guys. Let's just act like it is.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah, exactly. Face-to-face. I mean, it's better obviously.

Lara Casey:

Totally agree. It's good.

Nancy Ray:

So everyone knows you as the goal setting guru, and you have helped me set so many wonderful, meaningful, purposeful goals in my own life. How do you think goal setting ties into living intentionally?

Lara Casey:

I love this question. It's actually something I've been chewing on a lot this week and even today is, and I haven't fully fleshed this out. So we're going just flesh it out a little bit together. But I think the idea that we tend to put our goals on a pedestal. I've gotten this wrong a million times in my life, as I'm sure everybody else has. We set a goal, we declare it to the world, and then we get really frustrated when that goal fails us or when we feel like a failure after that. So what I think is missing, how goal setting helps us to live intentionally is we have to take the first step, which is to uncover what actually matters. And I see this all the time. I see people say, "Okay. I'm going to set goals. Let me start by naming my goals, and then we're going to break them down." I was like hold up. If you start by just setting a goal and just naming it without first uncovering what really matters in the big picture, your goals are going to be completely fruitless, and you're going to be super frustrated about two weeks when you haven't made any progress on that goal because

you're not motivated by it.

So a goal is just a way of getting there. A goal is just a way of... It's like the how of how you live out what matters. It's kind of like just a tool in your toolkit. So goals help us. Learning how to set goals, and Nancy, of course, you're so intentional with setting goals. Learning how to set goals helps us to take what we know matters in the big picture, what we know lasts longer than us, and do something about it. And the way we do something about it changes over time in our various seasons of life. As I know everyone listening probably knows about your story, having so many kids really fast. The way that you approached goals has probably changed in various seasons. Yes, I can totally relate to that. But the thing that does not change is what matters. And what matters does not change.

So it's more important to focus on the things that matter or the thing that matters, and for us, of course, that's our faith in God. And how we get there is not as important as why we get there. So it's kind of a round about answer to your question. But something I'm chewing on a lot is I think that we focus too much on our goals instead of why we're doing them in the first place. And that gives us such freedom and fun to make our goals happen in various creative ways throughout our seasons.

Nancy Ray:
That's so good.

Lara Casey:
Otherwise, we kind of get in this mode where we set a goal, and we want to live more intentionally. We say, "Okay. I've got this picture of what it looks like to live intentionally in my head, and I'm going to do these eight things a day for the rest of my life." And then we don't do them on day two. We'd be like, "We're a failure, and we're never going to make it." And then we just don't try, and it's no wonder that doesn't work.

Nancy Ray:
So true.

Lara Casey:
Yeah.

Nancy Ray:
Yeah. I love what you said about seasons. I'm thinking of myself, and man, Nancy pre-kids is like setting a million goals, going after all of them, doing pretty much all of them. I love setting goals, and I love reaching them. And having children has taught me... I don't mean to scare anybody who hasn't had kids yet. You'll still be able to set goals and do them. But it looks very different for me now, and it is learning that my capacity to achieve a lot of work goals or a lot of things for me is just different now because my goals have changed according to my season. I think someone listening to this is maybe frustrated because you're in a season where you're not achieving as many goals or able to do all that you want to do. Just take a deep breath and know that goals change with seasons, and that is okay and that's good. It's refining. So just kind of open up your hands and let the Lord refine you in that because I still feel him refining me in that. I love to do things, and I love to go. And sometimes I get frustrated because a kid gets sick or I don't know, X, Y, and Z. There's so many things that kids just... They need their momma. They take up a lot of my bandwidth.

I love what you said, focusing on what matters because when I think about achieving the goal, I get frustrated. But when I think about what matters and slowing down and not reaching that goal for the sake of loving on my sick kid, it don't matter. Not reaching the goal doesn't matter anymore as much as the thing that is in front of me, which is my children. That's what matters. Leaving that legacy and being a present mom is way more important than me getting this product out the door in time or running a half marathon or whatever. Those things will come again in time. But right now for my season, going back to what matters is the thing that not only helps me reach the goals that I need to be reaching but keeps me sane. Because I don't think, "Oh my gosh, I'm never going to be able to do things again. Oh my gosh, I'm frustrated." No, what I'm doing right now in this season is the thing that matters. That's the goal that I'm trying to reach after. So very liberating.

Lara Casey:

I love that. I love that in that you're taking the long view. I think that's what we do is we take this short view of, "Well, I wrote down this list of goals, and I declared them to the world." In declaring those, we have to really walk a fine line. In saying our goals, we can say them so that we have value. We don't even know we're doing it, but we might say, "I'm going to achieve this in the new year." And I've done that before. Totally done that.

Nancy Ray:

Oh, me too. 100%.

Lara Casey:

And it makes us feel like, "Okay. We are going to be more whole because of this goal that we've set." And I'm not saying goals are bad, clearly. But goals are just the how. You have to have the first step first. And so I've been chewing on these words that maybe don't make sense and still working on them here. But goals are not the goal. What matters is what matters, and I keep coming back to that that when we focus on what matters... And we could unpack that in a million ways, what matters. But when we focus on what matters, it gives us the freedom to fail because we're still going to get back up and do it. We just may get back up and do it a different way.

Nancy Ray:

I love that. I love that so much. Goals are not the goal, what is the rest? What matters is what matters.

Lara Casey:

What matters is what matters.

Nancy Ray:

It's so simple. But it's such a good thing to live by. Love that. And it's freeing for a mom of young kids. I will just say that. That's freeing because for most of my life, goals have been the goal.

Lara Casey:

And there's nothing wrong with that. Right? Goals are good. Jesus had goals.

Nancy Ray:

And I've accomplished a lot of cool things because of goals. If I never sat that scary goal of running a half marathon, the non-athletic Nancy who never could do anything. I set that scary goal, and I did it. That's one of my things I'm most proud of, and that would have never happened if I didn't set a goal. But what matters is what matters, which is really my health. And so I don't know. I think I'm going to probably come back to that and repeat that, too. Margin for the meaningful, and...

Lara Casey:
All the M's. All the M's.

Nancy Ray:
I'm just going to go back and listen to this episode again. The goal is not the goal. What matters is what matters. Okay.

Lara Casey:
There you go.

Nancy Ray:
All these things, you guys, this is great. I have one more question, and then I have some fun questions. But before that, I do want to... I love this phrase that comes from C12, which you love C12. I know you're in C12. My husband's C12 group, which if you're listening for the first time, C12 is what my husband does for work. He works with Christian business owners and CEOs to build great businesses for a greater purpose with really kingdom mindedness. But one of the things, one of the phrases that C12 lives by and talks about all the time is priorities are what we do. Everything else is just talk.

Lara Casey:
I was just repeating those words to myself today.

Nancy Ray:
Yeah. Priorities are what we do. Everything else is just talk. And that to me is like dang, yes. Priorities are what we do, and I think that goals help us live more intentionally because they help us set those priorities and then actually do something about them.

Lara Casey:
Absolutely. Yes. And I think is where you tie in the fact that again goals are not bad. It's just the absence of a driving purpose that is focused on what really lasts in this life, that's when goals are not good. But you can also be very focused on what matters, and without goals, you're not going to do anything about it. So that's what I love those words for is that priorities are what we do, and everything else is just talk.

Nancy Ray:
So good. Okay. So last thing I want you to do is just to kind of paint me a picture because we talk about the power of visualization and getting what matters in the forefront of your mind. So paint me a picture, what does intentional living look like to Lara, to you?

Lara Casey:

I think of just one little vignette of our lives right now comes to mind, and it's bedtime with the kids. Don't get any perfect pictures in your head. Sometimes it's pulling teeth trying to get people to not squeeze the whole toothpaste tube out of the toothpaste. At night there's always craziness. But I do think about an anchor that has become more and more important to me as I see the effect of it on our children is praying out loud over the kids at night. And again no perfect pictures here. What I'm doing at night is just letting them in on my relationship with the Lord, and sometimes I'll ask them, "Hey, is there anything you want to pray for?" And they typically tell me to pray for it myself. I don't want to force them to do any of that. But sometimes we'll talk about things that were good or hard in our day, and I might pray for those things.

Lara Casey:

But more importantly intentional living to me is about... I mean, the word even intentional denotes purpose filled. So for me, it's very intentional and purpose filled to have this end cap anchor on our day where I am expressing our requests of course in our prayers and thanksgiving. But also getting an opportunity for my kids to hear that relationship I have with the Lord, and for me to tell them things that happened in my day too. To say, "Hey, I would have this really challenging conversation with this person, and I was feeling..." I share my feelings with them. "I was feeling this, and here's how I ask God to help me with it. And here's how he showed up today to help me with it." And it's never scripted. It's never perfect, but I think to me that's cultivating what matters is using these tiny things that really do add up as the big things because they are focused on the big picture of where we want to be when we're 80 or 90 or 100 years old.

I think what we do get wrong about intentional living and the trap we fall into is thinking that intentional living is a lifestyle that we set and forget, and that we follow a certain set of rhythms or routines or whatever it is and suddenly we're doing it. We're living intentionally. No, intentional living is hard. It's choosing to say no to the things that are in the way of what really matters in the big picture. It's making mistakes and getting back up again. But I think the whole, to summarize this, the whole what matters in this is focusing on the long view of saying, "Here's what I know is true in the big picture, and here's how I'm going to act like it today. Even if it's just two things that I do during the day that lead me to that, those things are going to add up."

Nancy Ray:

I love that. I think I get in my head about it, and I'm like, "I'll live intentionally when I do is this, this, this and this." And it's like-

Lara Casey:

When I get organized...

Nancy Ray:

Well, actually, you live intentionally right now, today. What does it look like for you today before you lay your head down to sleep tonight? What's one thing you're going to do today? Because that's where your legacy takes place, that's where it's happening is just in the small choices that you make every day. And more is caught than taught with children, and I love that you are just modeling that for them. I want to do that too because I think kids are so much more observant than we give them credit for. They're listening and they're watching and they're learning. And I

think I can get all in my head about, “Oh, I want to teach them this and do this.” They’re just honestly happy to do life right there with you and just catching what you put off. So I think that’s incredibly important is just to invite them in, listen to mommy’s prayer.

That’s what I did this morning. I was frustrated because Millie woke up before her little wake up clock. She was coughing. She’s been sick, and she came down and sat with me on the couch. I had my Bible and journal. And I was a little bit frustrated at first, and then I said, “No. I am going to just invite her in to this and tell her what mommy’s doing.”

Lara Casey:
So good.

Nancy Ray:
So I just said, “This is what mommy’s doing, and this is just an important time for mommy just to connect with God. Do you want me to read a little to you? Do you know what the work meek means?” Because we were talking about blessed are the meek. They shall inherit the Earth. So we looked up meek and talked about being humble and quiet. So it’s just like, “Okay, Lord, help me to just be intentional right now with what I have instead of being so consumed with getting everything all fixed and right, so that I can live intentional one day.” Like, no, just start doing it.

Lara Casey:
I love that.

What I love about that too is it’s so beautifully demonstrates that when we have our priority ordered, that way we know what’s really important in life. We get to seize those opportunities. I mean, and we’re all going to feel that tension of, “I plan to do this thing, and the kid woke up early.” I think I had the exact same thing happen this morning in a different way. It’s like Josh crawled in bed with us at 1:00 AM, and I had this huge meeting this morning. And I’m thinking to myself, “I need some sleep.” But I stopped myself, and I thought to myself, “No. I’m never going to get this time back with him to snuggle him and make him feel safe and secure in my relationship with him.” And so when we have what matters in view, we can recall that because we’re always going to forget stuff. We can recall that and access that and say, “Okay. In light of that, I get to pivot here. I get to make a different choice and go with it,” even when it’s hard.

Nancy Ray:
So true. Yup. So good. Man, Lara, this has been so good. I love that you said you can access that at any point, and that’s why it’s so important to keep that vision in front of you all the time. All the time. What is it that matters? What really matters? And it gives you so much grace and freedom to stick to your goal or veer from your goal or say, “What is the goal?” The goal’s not the goal.

Lara Casey:
That’s right.

Nancy Ray:
Get back to what matters.

Lara Casey:

Yup.

Nancy Ray:

So we're going to finish our conversation with just a fun round of questions. So just answer whatever comes to your mind.

Lara Casey:

All right.

Nancy Ray:

Anything fun. There's no rules. Just we'll have fun with it.

Lara Casey:

Okay. I'm stretching. I'm getting ready.

Nancy Ray:

What is a book that you're loving?

Lara Casey:

One that you recommended, The Practice of the Presence Of God. I feel like I'm finally digging in, and the Lord is letting me soak it up. It's been great.

Nancy Ray:

It is so good.

Lara Casey:

It's so good.

Nancy Ray:

Also, it's like \$7 on Amazon, and it's maybe not even, maybe like \$4. It's like tiny. You could fit it in your pocket, and it's one of the life changing books you'll ever read. Totally agree. What is a product you're loving?

Lara Casey:

I don't know why the first thing that comes to mind is my essential oils. I'm like so not an essential oil person really. But I really love the serenity oil. I don't remember who makes it, but goodness it just smells good. I just want to like dose myself in it.

Nancy Ray:

Do you put it on yourself? Do you have one of those little oil rollers?

Lara Casey:

I do. No, I just like take my finger and dump it on my hand and say, "Okay, where can I put this?"

Nancy Ray:

That's awesome. I would not consider myself an oily person either, but I have been diffusing. I diffuse it whenever my kids get sick. It's like my go-to. There's something really great about it. I love that.

Lara Casey:
It smells real good.

Nancy Ray:
It does. If you could share a meal with anybody, who would it be?

Lara Casey:
Oh. Well, this might be a cop out answer, but you and Will. We have had a long standing date that needs to happen.

Nancy Ray:
We have! That's such an honor. Wow. Honestly, I was thinking about that the other day.

Lara Casey:
Yeah. We need to make that happen. Yup.

Nancy Ray:
I'll put it on our to-do list. I'm setting a goal right now.

Lara Casey:
Yes. It matters, Nancy. It matters.

Nancy Ray:
Yes, it does. What did you want to be when you were little?

Lara Casey:
Oh, multiple things. I wanted to be a geologist at one point, an archeologist. Apparently I just like digging in dirt, and that would play into my life later on. I wanted to be an architect. I still like building things. And then in college, my college AIM handle was JazzCMU. So I went to Carnegie Mellon University. That's the CMU part. But I wanted to be a jazz singer. That's what I wanted to be.

Nancy Ray:
You could be. I've heard you sing. You could still do that.

Lara Casey:
You're very sweet.

Nancy Ray:
That would be really fun too. That's awesome. What are you most proud of in your life?

Lara Casey:
Choosing to lay down myself and follow the Lord, and I will never do that perfectly. Bu it just remember one particular moment in my life where God presented me an opportunity to... I can't even call

it an opportunity. He just presented me a choice to say, “Are you going to follow me or not?” And I know there’s been many choices like that over and over in my life. But one in particular stands out where it meant really dying to myself. It’s hard to say I’m proud of that, but I’m really grateful I decided to follow him.

Nancy Ray:

That’s so good. What does work and play mean to you?

Lara Casey:

First of all, I love that your podcast is called this because I know you so well, and to me you are the definition of this. I think work and play to me is worship while you work, and it’s being able to recognize that having fun is so a part of God’s heart. That freedom, that joy, that... Like this morning, to start our team meeting, I was like, “Okay, guys. Turn your cameras off. Turn on a song, and have a dance party.”

Nancy Ray:

That’s the best. I love it.

Lara Casey:

But I think that’s what it means to me is... I mean, it means a lot of things, but I think work and play, the play part to me is the worship. And when I get to combine the two of those things, it just feels like incredibly gratifying. Like getting to pray for a customer or getting to encourage a team member or disciple someone on the team, that to me is there’s nothing better than that.

Nancy Ray:

Totally agree. How do you maintain a healthy soul and a fulfilling life?

Lara Casey:

I think my real answer is that I don’t. I mean, I feel like I fall out of that so many times. So I would say that how I do it is I rely on God’s power in my weakness. There are so many times where I say to God, “I cannot do this.” Whether it’s in parenting or marriage or work or whatever it is. I mean, over and over, where I say, “Lord, you are literally the only person that can fix this or make this better.” And so I think it’s relying on him in my weakness.

Nancy Ray:

I feel like that’s the best answer because I feel the same way. The honest answer is that none of us perfectly do that. None of us really maintain a healthy soul and fulfilling life. There’s just accessing the Lord and knowing he is the key to that, knowing that we can’t do it on our own. But that if we can just kind of get in tune with him and abide in him, then that’s when I starts to feel like, “Okay. I’m doing this because he’s doing it for me. It’s not me.”

Lara Casey:

Yeah, and it sometimes feels like there’s this great divide between where we are spiritually and wherever we are with maintaining our soul and a fulfilling life and where we want to be. And that can feel so defeating. And yet here’s the strange conundrum of all this is that the more time, and when I say time, I don’t mean like hours at a time. But the more you turn your heart and your head and

your mind and your thoughts towards things that God loves and toward his word, even in little bits throughout the day. The more, number one, you want it but also the easier it is to stay in that place. And it just becomes a part of you. And you make different decisions and you stop looking at things of the world in the same way you always did. So I think there's a lot of freedom in knowing that, that the small things in our faith and just turning our eyes toward him in even a tiny little moment during your day can have an exponential ripple effect.

Nancy Ray:

Completely agree. That's beautiful. Oh, Lara, I love you. I'm really thankful to call you a friend.

Lara Casey:

I love you so much. I'm so grateful for you.

Nancy Ray:

Thank you for being here, and I'm sure everyone who's listening is going to be so grateful just to hear so much of what you shared. Where else can people find you, and then after that, I want to talk just a little bit about something we've been doing together for many, many years. But where can people find you?

Lara Casey:

This is so weird. My first thought was, they can find me chasing kids probably out in the cul de sac somewhere.

I just got a funny picture of my own self acting like a goofball. That's where you can find me. No, you can find us and the PowerSheets and all kinds of great free resources at cultivatewhatmatters.com.

Nancy Ray:

Yes, and following Lara on Instagram is one of my favorite things, too. You're so encouraging there.

Lara Casey:

You are sweet.

Nancy Ray:

You're just @LaraCasey, right?

Lara Casey:

Yes. You got it.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah. So Lara and I, we met each other, gosh, probably like 10 or 12 years ago. I don't even know now. Probably 12 years ago is more like it.

Lara Casey:

I think so.

Nancy Ray:

Lara started this conference called Making Things Happen, and by the time this podcast airs, it's going to be coming up in a little bit. So if you're interested in it, it happens once a year. It is incredible. It's been one of the most life changing experiences that I've had. It's really hard to explain what it's like. It's like you got to go and experience it. But it's two days in Chapel Hill, and you turn in your phone. And you don't have any access to phone, and you're handed a journal and a pen. And literally we just do... Lara leads this, but you just do work on this stuff in your life that matters and your dreams and where you are. It's a big heart check and a big life check. So I just wanted to mention that because I think that it's benefited me in my life so much. I still do things that I learned at Making Things Happen like 10 years ago. It's still part of my life. And every year that I do it, it reveals something new. It's brilliant. It's amazing. God shows up every time in such a cool way.

But I wanted to share about Making Things Happen, and then also just the PowerSheets. We talked so much today about goals and goal setting, and the PowerSheets are a tool. It's this journal. Lara, you could probably explain it better than me. But it's like this notebook, and I will just say it's like a mega notebook that's all for goal setting. But it's about setting the right goals. And so if you're listening to this and you're like, "I don't know. Maybe I missed the goal bandwagon," or, "I don't know." One thing Lara always says is there's nothing magical about January 1, it's just good to like stop, refocus on what matters, and then write goals on a monthly basis based on that.

So anyway, that's me not as Lara's friend but as a consumer of these products and as someone who believes in them and loves them, I just wanted to share that with the listeners. They're called PowerSheets, and that's what you can find at cultivatewhatmatters.com. And that's Lara business. Yeah, I just wanted to make sure you guys had those resources in your hand. So Lara, is there anything else that you would like to add?

Lara Casey:

I just love you, Nancy. I really do. I'm just so grateful that you put this podcast out, and I feel like it's been a long time coming. I feel like so many of us, including your close friends like me, we want to sit at your feet and learn from you and the experiences and life story that you've had. So just really grateful that you're doing this.

Nancy Ray:

Thank you. And likewise to you. Lara also has a podcast called Cultivate Your Life, and it's wonderful. And she is the best storyteller, and she tells so many stories over there. So make sure you check that out too. Thank you, Lara. I'm so grateful you are here today.

Lara Casey:

Oh my goodness. This was a delight.

Nancy Ray:

Okay. It's time for the Work and Play Corner Store. This is where we have a little bit of fun and draw mostly from my life experiences and the conversation I just had to bring you a book we're loving and a thing we're loving and that's it. Might be random, funny, serious, great, helpful. But the one rule I stick by is that it's something I personally use or recommend. I may get a commission from anything bought from these links which help me continue to bring this podcast to you every week. Plus, it's

just fun.

So today, I'm going to be adding the book *The Practice Of The Presence Of God* that Lara mentioned, as well as the PowerSheets to the Corner Store. Now I want to mention this book because I love it so much. It's so tiny. It's \$7 on Amazon. It's one of the most life changing books, and I love that Lara brought it up in our conversation again because it makes me want to go pick it up and read it again. It's very short. Actually just sent it to one of my friends in the mail. I think it's really great if you're having a hard time finding time to quietly spend with God every day. I recommend it to new moms a lot because it really helps you practice his presence and abide with God every day.

And the PowerSheets, this is... If you've never heard of PowerSheets before, you just need to go to cultivatewhatmatters.com and check this out. PowerSheets are this goal setting notebook tool that is unlike anything you've ever seen. It's very thorough, and it helps you set your goals for the year and then carry them out every single month and even every single day. It's beautiful. It's inspiring. I love my PowerSheets. I've used them, I don't know, since the beginning of time. Since they were created, I've been using them. And I really love them. They've evolved every year and have turned into something really beautiful. So go check those out at cultivatewhatmatters.com.

Thanks for listening to Episode 40 of Work and Play with Nancy Ray.

Everything I've mentioned today can be found in the show notes at NancyRay.com/podcast/40. And you can find me at NancyRay.com or follow me @NancyRay on Instagram or Facebook almost daily.

I'm going to close with words from Lara in her book *Cultivate*:

“Unrushing our lives is a risk though, isn't it? It means we may have to give up something or a lot of things in order to slow down. And often we don't like the idea of slowing down because it sounds unproductive. But we risk missing something far more valuable than our productivity and keeping at a great pace. Life. Real life.”

Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.