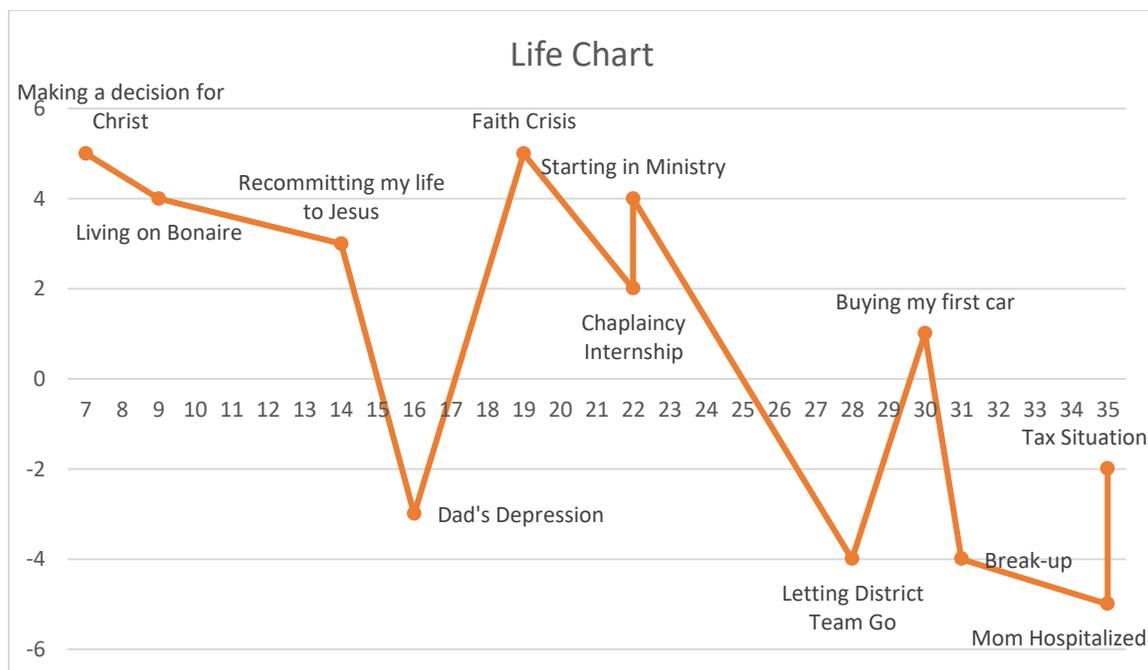


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SF 610 Desarrollo Humano

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14 de marzo del 2022



1. Discuss how the occurrence of these significant events were decisive in the course that your life has taken until today, the feelings you have experienced in light of them, the attitudes you've developed, the ways of thinking you've taken on about yourself or about life, and any other important aspect you consider relevant.

I grew up in a Christian home. My father was pastoring a church in Venezuela when I was born and by the time I was three-years-old, my parents served as missionaries with Trans World Radio (TWR) in the Dutch Caribbean. I can recall several moments from my early childhood where my mother emphasized my need for Jesus, but it was not until I was seven-years-old during a Vacation Bible School (VBS) presentation that I fully sensed the conviction of God's Spirit and realized Christ's sacrifice for me. At that age I was fully aware that my heart was rotten. As the oldest of two girls I treated my

younger sister badly (I was essentially a bully to her), I carried unexplainable anger, envy, and even hatred in my heart, I lied profusely, and I knew I was disobedient. Still, it didn't seem so bad until the woman speaking to the assembly of children during VBS made it explicitly clear that we all deserved eternal punishment in hell for our sins. I started to listen as she then explained that Jesus lovingly and willingly offered himself and took our punishment on the cross so that all who believed in Him and received Him would be spared from eternal torment and instead would have eternal life and Christ in his or her heart. By that time in my life I knew very well what being punished felt like and I had seen my sister get punished for something I had lied about and done, yet here was Jesus willing offering Himself for me, and I remember being moved to tears by my guilt and by His sacrifice, love, and mercy. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that my life in Christ began that day, and I recall my mind being opened to the reality of God's sovereignty, of His omniscience, and to the reality of eternity in ways that were overwhelming and just as real as the physical world that I could experience through my senses. Although there have definitely moments in my life when I've pushed God to the backseat following my conversion, the Lord has constantly brought me back throughout my life to that small, stuffy, Sunday School room where I gave my heart to him to remind me I am His. I knew that day that I was truly and fully forgiven, that something had changed at the very core of my soul and that Jesus was not only the God-man who died on a cross for the sins of the world, but that He was the One who specifically died to save me. Still, you'll notice on the chart that at the age of fourteen, at the end of eighth grade, I re-committed my life to Christ. Middle school was a time when I was desperate for belonging and tried to fit in with my classmates in ways that I recognized contradicted my desire for them to know Jesus. I was so invested in being like my friends that I neglected being Jesus to them. At the end of that school year I realized that there were friends that I would never see again because we were off to different schools, and I was deeply convicted of the time I had wasted trying to gain their acceptance rather than faithfully pointing them to Christ. Consequently, that was the moment in my life that I resolved to live for Jesus in all of my relationships and contexts rather than continuing to compartmentalize Him to my home and church life. I can see

that moment as a turning point for me as I realized that Christ is invested in my every move and interaction.

Despite that moment of resolve in my life, while I was in college I did face a season when my faith and beliefs were challenged and I found myself unsure of the certainty of the things I had been taught. I began to question the existence of God, the infallibility and reliability of Scripture, the intentions and purpose of the Church, and the truth of Jesus. That season, though initially very disorienting, is marked as one of the most positive experiences on my chart because it was through that experience that I sought after the person of Christ to know the truth for myself and to own my faith in such a way that I am more certain today about who Jesus is and the truth of the Bible than in all my years of growing up in the church. In fact, I would say that the experience of that faith crisis was key in my desire to work with young people in hopes that they too would be challenged and move from following their parent's faith to discovering the beauty and wonder of Christ for themselves.

As I've done this exercise, I've realized that some of the most significant and shaping events in my life have been more so seasons I've gotten to live rather than singular moments in time. One of these seasons was the time I spent on Bonaire. My parents were born in Cuba and left to Venezuela where they lived for six years (and where my sister and I were born). By the time I was three and my sister was one, my parents accepted a position with TWR that moved us to the tiny Dutch Caribbean island of Bonaire, right off the coast of Venezuela. I lived there until a month before my tenth birthday. Although it's been nearly thirty years since we left, I can still pinpoint so many things about myself that find their origin in the time I lived on the island. For one, my love for the beach, for nature, for adventure and for exploring new and different places comes from that season of my life. As a family we would drive down to the old lighthouse to watch the moonrise at dusk or would drive up hills to have a sunrise breakfast on a blanket under a tree. We would climb up and down rocks to reach isolated beaches and often went exploring to find new places to enjoy God's creation. To this day, the beach is a place of solace and refreshment for my soul as it reminds me of God's care for me from my childhood until now. While on the island, my mother enrolled my sister and I in a Venezuelan cultural institute where I discovered my love for

theater and the arts as I took part in a children and youth's community theatre production. Bonaire's culture is shaped by a number of different influences which in turn have shaped me. While on the island, apart from speaking Spanish at home, I had to learn Papiamentu (the local language), Dutch in school (the official language), and English (the language of our TWR church and friends). I have lost nearly all of my Papiamentu and Dutch since then, but I'm the only one in the family that has opted to preserve her Dutch citizenship rather than becoming a U.S. citizen. Although we had no blood family on the island, I grew up with "aunts" and "uncles" from Ecuador, Venezuela, and Brazil, with Sunday School teachers from the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain, and with school teachers from the nearby islands and from The Netherlands. At the same time, we used to travel every year to either Venezuela to visit our Cuban family who had stayed in the country when we moved to Bonaire, or to Miami and Naples, Florida to spend time with other relatives. As a result, I love learning about different cultures, eating different foods, and especially connecting with all different kinds of people. Though I attribute a lot of my ability to adapt and to be flexible to the fact that I lived in three different countries before I was a preteen, this experience has also left me feeling like a sojourner most of my life. There is not one single country that I can claim as my own: my family is from Cuba (a place I've never been), I was born in Venezuela but left at the age of three and have not been back since I was nine, I have a Dutch passport but have never been to the Netherlands and I can no longer speak the language, I've now lived in the United States most of my life but I'm not a citizen and don't fully identify as an "American" (though American culture is probably one of the strongest currents of influence in my life), I'm Latin American who has never studied in Latin America, and I've lost the language of my childhood island home which provokes a greater sense of disconnection from a culture that was so intricately a part of my life. Yet, although I cannot claim any one of these places as 100% mine, they all make up 100% of my story. I am a sojourner, and even though I've lived in Kissimmee, FL for nearly twenty years, there's still the slightest inkling in me that I might not be here forever; I live aware of the possibility that at some point the Lord may move me again to a different city, state, or even country. I have not identified a call to go outside of the U.S. just yet or to missions in the traditional sense, but a part of me understands that I

should remain open to this, just in case, and that whoever I chose to join my life with in marriage, should also be open to this, just in case as well.

Three of my lowest points on my line involve ministry, my love-life, and my family. In 2014, at the age of twenty-eight, I had already been serving in full-time ministry in the local church for nearly six years, had spent 2-3 years as a co-director of youth ministry in the district, and had now been the sole Youth Director for the Spanish Eastern District since 2012. I had a team of seven young-adults who helped in the planning and execution of all our district events and even aided me in visiting some of the churches in our district. While I appreciated their labor of love and understood that they were doing what was being asked of them, my leaders felt differently. I was summoned by one of the members of the District Executive Committee and informed that the team was not meeting their expectations and that they felt the churches were not receiving the support they needed from us. Consequently, I was given the task to dismiss five of the seven team members and develop a new team from the remaining two. This broke me. These young adults were not only my team, they were young people who had grown-up with me in the ministry and were my friends. I remember saying that I didn't think that it was fair to let them go, that if anything, I possibly had not been leading them well and that I didn't think it was fair to have them pay for my poor leadership. I would've preferred to be dismissed myself than to have to let go of most of my team. I didn't quit or step down because I did not sense from God that I should have, but I did not want to let my team go either. I was given two months to decide who would go and who I would keep and to inform the members that were being let go that their assignment with the district would end after the youth summer events. I was in a complete crisis and heartbroken. By the time the deadline arrived, I still hadn't decided who would stay and who would go, and I broke the news to the team that some of them would not be able to continue with us after the summer. I understood that I had to present this decision to them as if it were my own rather than an order I had received from above me. I carried out the instructions I was given but these were completely against my will. I felt like an absolute failure. I had not been meeting the expectations of my leaders, but most of all I had failed my team. For the next year and a half I was completely hesitant to bring on new team members, in part because of the loyalty I still felt towards the members I was

forced to let go and in part because I was afraid I'd fail again and find myself in a similar position down the road. I carried that sense of failure with me for years and this hurt my ability to be innovative, creative, and to be a risk-taker in the role as District Youth Director. I have also had a hard time forgiving myself for the ways I felt I let the team down. It's been in recent years that the Lord has helped me move past that moment by His grace, rather than allowing it to define me as a leader and as a person.

In 2017 I faced a really difficult breakup. The person I was dating was someone I had completely fallen in love with; he was the person I pictured spending the rest of my life with and serving in ministry together. Early in our courtship he had expressed a potential call to missions or pastoral ministry, was full of dreams and ambition, and served as a volunteer with our youth ministry for several years. Sadly, half way through our relationship I began to notice shifts and changes in his walk with Jesus, in his attitude towards the church and towards life, and in his treatment towards me. At first, I thought he was potentially burnt-out, and although this may have factored in, he was wrestling with a much deeper inner turmoil than I could've imagined at the time. In light of the changes I saw in him I initially confronted him and hoped that things would improve, but instead they got worst to the point where he was embracing and becoming someone I could not see myself marrying, as much as I loved him. I made the difficult decision of breaking up with him, but my heart has grieved for that relationship for several years since. In the time since the break-up, he has left the church but we have had the opportunity to share occasionally about what went wrong between us. In those conversations he's confronted me with my own character flaws and things that I did that also hurt him more than helped him. Some of these have included my tendency to seek out the approval of others at the expense of those I love, my desire to control, my pride, my tendency to push for things to be done my way and in my time, my difficulty with boundaries in saying "no" and accepting "no" from others, my lack of active listening at times, my perfectionism, my propensity to act out a Messiah-complex by trying to "fix" others, and my fear of failure. It has been terribly painful to confront these things in me, but it has also been freeing to allow God's grace to be poured out over each one of these struggles in my heart to allow Christ to be more fully formed in me. The break-up has also served to help me to trust God's will and provision for my life beyond what my

eyes can see and what my heart may desire, to extend grace and forgiveness for hurts I never thought I would experience, to intercede for the prodigals in ways I never had before, to exercise self-control and develop healthier boundaries, and to ground my sense of well-being in the person of Christ over any other person. Nevertheless, it's been an emotionally difficult and trying few years, but it's been a reminder that "soul work is slow work." I have no doubt that God provided that relationship as a safe space for both my ex and I to fail and to reveal to us our profound need for Jesus' work and healing in the darkest parts of our heart. The Lord has made it clear that this relationship was not for marriage, but it has been deeply impactful nonetheless.

I lived the absolute lowest point on the chart less than a year ago. The very last weekend of July 2021 my mother tested positive with Covid-19. Having immediately received a video consultation from her doctor, she spent the first few days isolated at home, but by day six, her fever spiked and her oxygen had dropped considerably. I took her to the nearest hospital Emergency Department around midnight one Friday evening and had to leave her there to be hospitalized because her x-rays revealed pneumonia in both her lungs and she was dehydrated. My mother also has several comorbidities: high blood pressure, arthritic osteoporosis, arterial fibrillation in the heart, a heart murmur, and fibrosis in one of her lungs. The first two days the reports we were receiving from the doctors seemed really hopeful: mom had not needed supplemental oxygen and her condition seemed to be improving. Suddenly, on day three, everything took a turn for the worse—mom's fever was rising again, her oxygen levels dropped to the point where they had to connect her to oxygen, and they were pushing to have her receive plasma in hopes that this would help her fight off the virus. That same afternoon, the mom of two of my young adults died of complications with Covid-19 at another nearby hospital, and one of my aunts who lived three hours away had contracted the virus and was needing medical attention. I spent the next six days feeling like I was walking through the valley of the shadow of death. I feared the night and I could not face the morning. After learning about the death of one our church members, I didn't know how to pray for my mother. My young adults had been praying for their mother, but the Lord chose to take her home. Who was I and who was my mother to receive a different outcome? I experienced a strange type of survivor's guilt: if God had not spared their mother, why

would he spare mine? In those days I was forced to bring my deepest fears of loss to Jesus, to choose to say “Lord, I know you can deliver, but even if you don’t, I will still praise you,” and to surrender my mother to His sovereign will. This was also a time when I prayed and leaned on the body of Christ in a way I never had before. For starters, I found myself running to Jesus for the slightest request and seeking my father out to pray together several times throughout the day. I also received daily calls from several members of the church who prayed for me and with me and who sustained me by their faith when mine was faltering. During those days I also experienced God’s gracious and faithful provision through the members of the body of Christ who would willingly show up at my door with food not knowing that my father and I had not been able to shop or prepare a meal as we quarantined and followed up with the hospital several times a day. My mother was discharged and came home with supplemental oxygen which she would need to use for the next three months. My aunt went to be with the Lord ten days later. Even in that loss, the presence of Jesus was palpably with us and He gifted me several passages of Scripture to share with my uncle and family in the times we had been praying for her and trusting Jesus with her life. In those days I learned that to surrender to God’s will is to surrender to His goodness, and I lived the passage that neither death nor life, nor the fears of today or the worries of tomorrow can separate me from His love. Since those months, I’ve had to continuously entrust my family to the Lord. I confess that I’ve had a residual fear of losing them, but every time that fear arises in my heart, it has been an opportunity to cast my cares on Jesus. I am so much more aware of the brevity of life, of my own frailty and mortality, and have been taking small steps to be more intentional and present where the Lord has me and with the people in my life.

2. If you had the opportunity to change events in your life, what would you change and why?

One of the events I definitely would change in my life would be the events that took place when I was told to let my district team go. Looking back, I recognize that I was so overcome with shame at the fact that my team was not meeting expectations and so

distraught that I had to let my team go, that it practically paralyzed me. Although I did ask for some initial direction on how to approach the team to break the news to them, I took it upon myself to figure out how to do it on my own rather than seeking out greater counsel to honor my team and carry out the instructions given to me in the best possible way. I know that I was very clumsy in the way I went about things and committed a number of mistakes along the way that made an already difficult situation even more disorienting and confusing for the people affected. If I had gone over my next steps with my superiors, I'm sure they would have guided me in that process, but because of how awful I felt, I avoided talking about the situation with anyone and carried that burden alone. I think something else I would've done differently is possibly stand my ground against my superior that I didn't believe my team members deserved to be let go, that I couldn't and wouldn't present that decision as my own, and that if my superiors understood that this was still the best course of action, then I preferred they be the ones to speak to my team personally rather than have me be the one to let them go.

3. Considering the present state of your life and your future goals, mention which ones you would like the next three most significant events to be in your life and why.

The next three significant events I would love to experience in my life would be traveling with my parents to either Cuba or Bonaire, marriage, and motherhood.

I would love to travel with my parents to visit and experience the island of Cuba to see the places I've been hearing about all my life, to walk the streets and visit the *fincas*, houses, and churches that saw my family grow, and to share those same spaces with my mother and father. My story is intimately intertwined with their story and it would mean the world to me to experience Cuba with them. At the same time, there are a number of emotional, financial, ideological and political hurdles that stand in the way of a potential visit to Cuba. My parents left the island under government surveillance and although my father has returned twice on short visits during my teenage years, my mother has never returned since 1983 and she's unsure she would be able to remain civil in the face of injustice. If we never make it to Cuba, I would at least love to visit the

island where my parents raised me and where we made some of our loveliest memories as a family. None of us have returned since our last visit in 1999. I'd say we're overdue.

I long to share life and ministry with a life partner and to serve God as a help-mate to a husband who loves Jesus with all that he is. I don't believe I'm missing out on anything for lack of a husband right now, but I think it would be incredible to be on mission with someone and to build a life together with him.

Along with marriage, I would like to be a mother (although I confess it scares me to pieces, especially seeing through my sister how hard motherhood can be) and raise my children to be men and women who know and love Jesus and who make a difference in the world for the sake of God's kingdom.

4. Indicate what score you would give your life in this moment and why.

Initially, when I read this prompt, I considered giving myself a 2.5 but it felt too low a number so instead, in this present moment I would give my life a 3. I went with 3 because although I'm facing a couple of trying situations, I'm readily experiencing the Lord's favor and presence in my life in such a way that His comfort has been readily available to me, my family is in good health, my needs are being met, and I love what I'm studying and what I get to do for a living. I don't give my life a higher score because there are still some things that I would like to continue to grow in personally, there's questions I need clarity on, and there's a few situations in my life that still need to be resolved.

5. Indicate what score you would give your life overall looking at its story in its totality and why.

Overall, as I look back over my story I would give my life a 3 because in spite of the most painful and heartbreaking moments I've lived, I have been able to see how God is continuing to work out all things for my good and for Christ to be more fully formed in me. I don't give my life a higher score because there are things I've regretted along the way and some areas of my life where I wish I was further along by this age; in other

words, if I had made better choices in some situations in my life, I think my score would be higher, but then again, this is indicative of my need to allow God's grace to continue to be sufficient for me and to continue to love and forgive myself for my shortcomings in the same way that Christ has loved and forgiven me.