

Thoughts on Thriving and Flourishing in Our Senior Years All Saints 50+ Class – 3/20/22 - Handout

1. An email from a good friend got me thinking...

"For some time now the challenge to 'thrive' has been bouncing around my brain and penetrating my heart. In the midst of life's chaos it is so very easy to drift into a 'survival' mode where our primary focus is to simply get through the present. But that is simply not God's plan for us. In times like this I typically grab my pen and process these thoughts in my journal. Here's what I've come up with so far.

"Surviving,' for me, generally involves a focus on myself and my circumstances. It's doing whatever is necessary to get through whatever is holding me back. It's a focus on the here and now.

"Thriving,' on the other hand, again for me, is to cheerfully focus on the needs of others and their wellbeing while keeping my eyes on Jesus and the future eternity I'll spend with Him.

"I am committed to focusing on thriving. The question remains: how will I do that?"

Don Graybill; A friend living with a major health challenge...

2. Some definitions... A little help from Webster...

Thrive: verb, 1: to grow vigorously : flourish, 2: to gain in wealth or possessions : prosper 3: to progress toward or realize a goal despite or because of circumstances – Origin Middle English from Old Norse – to grow vigorously – plants/agriculture

Thriving: adjective, meaning characterized by success or prosperity - a *thriving* business...

Flourish: verb, 1: to grow luxuriantly : Thrive, 2a: to achieve success : Prosper a flourishing business, b: to be in a state of activity or production, c: to reach a height of development or influence 3: to make bold and sweeping gestures

Flourishing: adjective, meaning marked by vigorous and healthy growth a flourishing garden: very active and successful a flourishing career

Struggle: verb, 1: to make strenuous or violent efforts in the face of difficulties or opposition *struggling* with the problem 2: to proceed with difficulty or with great effort: *struggled* through the high grass *struggling* to make a living

Struggle: noun, 1: Contest, Strife armed *struggle* a power *struggle*, 2: a violent effort or exertion : an act of strongly motivated striving - a *struggle* to make ends meet , 3:Tussle 1. during the *struggle* the gun went off

Struggling: adjective, Striving to achieve or attain something in the face of difficulty or resistance.

Surviving: adjective, 1: Still living after another or others have died, 2: Continuing to exist; remaining intact.

3. Some Scriptures to start... Does God really want us to flourish?

Psalms 1:1-3 (NIV) Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Psalms 52:8-9 (NIV) (David) But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. ⁹ I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.

Psalms 92:12-15 (NIV) The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; ¹³ planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴ They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, ¹⁵ proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Proverbs 11:28 (NIV) Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.

Isaiah 1:29-31 (NIV) "You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. ³⁰ You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. ³¹ The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire."

Jeremiah 11:16-17 (NIV) The LORD called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken. ¹⁷ The LORD Almighty, who planted you, has decreed disaster for you, because the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done evil and provoked me to anger by burning incense to Baal.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NIV) "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.⁸ He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

John 7:37-43 (NIV) On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?"⁴² Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.

John 10:10 (ESV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 15:1-8 (NIV) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

"God wants us to flourish. What does flourishing look like? The Psalmist paints a picture of a flourishing life in Psalm 92...

"The Psalmist uses an analogy to describe the flourishing life, comparing a flourishing life to the Middle Eastern palm tree. What can a palm tree tell us about flourishing?

"Palm trees grow to ninety-feet tall, have a lifespan of nearly two-hundred years and bear dates. Nearly every part of the tree was used; leaves provided roofs for homes, dates fed people and animals, and the flowers produced alcohol. It's no wonder that in the Bible, a palm tree is a term of admiration. What can a palm tree tell us about flourishing?

"Old age does not diminish this tree's beauty or fruitfulness. What's the lesson behind the flourishing palm tree? A flourishing person is planted in God's house, enjoying His presence and nourishment. Like the palm tree, a flourishing person is a picture of strength whose life consistently bears fruit for others to use and enjoy."

Bill Mowry; *Designed to Flourish*; p. 4.

4. Thriving is more than a simple acronym...

Acronyms are sometimes helpful and sometimes a bit too flippant or trite, too forced. "I have to make this fit."

T – Trust; H – Honesty; R – Renewal; I – Invest; V – Victorious; E – Engage

5. A quick look at surviving...

"Sometimes, life can be overwhelming, we feel like we are out of control. God seems far away, and we don't feel the warmth of His presence, love, or direction of our lives. We definitely aren't thriving at those points, we are just hanging on, trying to survive."

Living Abundantly Ministries Blog; 2/28/17

"If we are honest, we can look back on the last year and say we only survived it. We survived work. We survived school. We survived with most of our relationships intact. Some of us have not survived very well. Maybe our circle of friends has changed. Maybe our families are different than they were this time last year, and we have survived some major storms.

"In fact, a lot of us are in survival mode right now:

If I can just get to this weekend...

If I can just make it to the first of the month...

If I can just get to summer vacation...

If I can just finish this project...

If I can just beat this sickness...

If I can just make this payment...

If I can just get the kids through college...

"...If you're not careful, you will live your life with that same survival attitude..."

"You were not made to survive life. Or to survive work. Or school. Or your family. You were not made to exist until you get over the next hump or get to the next break. You were created for one purpose: to know God and to make Him known."

You Were Meant to Thrive; Mark Hall blog; 2/11/14

What does surviving look like to you? What is your definition of surviving?

6. What do thriving and flourishing look like? What are the attitudes that make up thriving?

A. There will be tough times... Sooner or later most of us will hear a bad diagnosis or be in the middle of a hard circumstance...

A thriving life is not the “prosperity gospel.” What is your definition of “the prosperity gospel?”

“Prosperity theology (sometimes referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, the gospel of success, or seed faith) is a religious belief among some Protestant Christians that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth.

“Prosperity theology has been criticized by leaders from various Christian denominations, including within some Pentecostal and charismatic movements, who maintain that it is irresponsible, promotes idolatry, and is contrary to the Bible. Secular as well as some Christian observers have also criticized prosperity theology as exploitative of the poor. The practices of some preachers have attracted scandal, and some have been charged with financial fraud.

“Prosperity theology views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity. The doctrine emphasizes the importance of personal empowerment, proposing that it is God's will for his people to be blessed. The atonement (reconciliation with God) is interpreted to include the alleviation of sickness and poverty, which are viewed as curses to be broken by faith. This is believed to be achieved through donations of money, visualization, and positive confession.”
Wikipedia

B. God is in control; our lives are in His hands... it comes down to the issue of trust...

Acts 17:26 (NIV) From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

Psalms 31:14-15 (NIV) But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." ¹⁵ My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.

Psalms 20:7 (NIV) Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

C. Stay close to Jesus... Keep growing and deepening your spiritual life...

Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health... From the book: *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*; Donald S. Whitney; NavPress.

a. Question One: Do you thirst for God?

p. 16 The apostle Paul... Despite his maturity in Christ and all he had seen and experienced, late in life Paul wrote of the passion that propelled him: ‘...that I many know Him’ (Phil 3:10). What is he talking about? Didn't he already know Jesus more closely than perhaps anyone else ever would? Of course he did. But the more he knew Jesus, the more he wanted to know Him. The more Paul progressed in spiritual strength, the more thirsty for God he became.

“With a similar thirst, the writer of Psalm 42:1-2 prayed, ‘As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?’ Does this describe your thirst for God? If so, be encouraged; whatever else is transpiring in your Christian life, your soul-thirst is a sign of soul-growth.”

b. Question 2: Are you governed increasingly by God's Word?

p. 31 & 33 “So one question by which you can evaluate your spiritual health and growth is, ‘Are you governed increasingly by God's Word? ... Are you indifferent to the truth of Scripture? Are you in retrograde? Or does God's Word have a growing influence in your life?’”

c. Question 3: Are you more loving?

p. 41 “Let me get right to the point. Jesus said that love is the clearest mark of a Christian... If you are growing in your love for others—especially for Christians—then you are growing as a Christian.”

d. Question Four: Are you more sensitive to God's presence?

p. 55 – 56 “When was the last time you thought, ‘God is here?’ ...how often are you aware of the presence of God? If we take the teaching of the Bible seriously, perception of the presence of God should not be an occasional experience. I do not mean that we should frequently feel a supernatural presence, for that can be extremely unreliable. Nevertheless, it should not be

unusual for us, wherever we are, to recognize that 'God is here.' As we grow closer to Him, generally speaking, we should discern His immanence more readily and more often."

e. Question Five: Do you have a growing concern for the spiritual and temporal needs of others?

p. 70 "Christianity is a religion of concern for others. Among what are called the 'great religions of the world,' Christianity has no parallel when it comes to demonstrating concerns for people and for their needs. Whether the needs are temporal or eternal, felt or unperceived, no other religion is known for its love and compassion, not only for those within its ranks, but particularly toward those outside its circle of adherents..."

"Meeting needs is the way of Jesus. And those following Jesus can trace their progress toward His likeness by tracking their growth in their concern for the spiritual and temporal needs of others."

f. Question Six: Do you delight in the bride of Christ?

p. 82 "...like Christ, the man or woman who has been given the Spirit of Jesus would love what Jesus loves and died for—His bride, the church. So one of the best tests of whether we belong to Christ is whether we delight in His delight, namely, the people who comprise His church."

p. 83 "...everyone indwelt by the Spirit of God is a saint, or as the Greek word literally means, a 'holy one.' Saints aren't exceptionally devoted believers now in Heaven, rather they are people who believe and live the Word of God in their workaday world—the kind of people David spoke of a 'saints who are in the earth.'

"Delighting in Christ's people is normal, healthy Christianity. So permit me to ask you this question to help you diagnose your spiritual health: Do you delight in the bride of Jesus Christ?"

g. Question Seven: Are the spiritual disciplines increasingly important to you?

p. 92 - 93 "Nothing contributes to the growth of spiritual heat and light more than the persevering practice of the Christian spiritual disciplines. The disciplines are the bellows and the iron poker—tools in God's hands through which He stokes and blows upon the eternal fire He Himself ignites in His people.

"The spiritual disciplines are the God-oriented means by which we bring ourselves before God, experience Him, and are changed into Christlikeness. The Lord is omnipresent, and we often encounter Him in unexpected places and surprising ways. Nevertheless, it has pleased Him to establish specific means—spiritual disciplines—whereby we may expect to encounter Him regularly and be transformed by Him. If the Lord might be compared to a pure, life-giving river, the spiritual disciplines would be those ways by which we come to the river to drink from, dive into, swim in, eat from, wash with, and irrigate with it."

h. Question Eight: Do you still grieve over sin?

p. 102 "Perhaps the world has never seen a man closer to Christ than the apostle Paul in the final years of his life. And yet, having grown into such a universally recognized example of Christlikeness, having audibly heard the voice of the Lord Himself on several occasions, having been given the privilege of glimpsing the glories of Heaven itself, Paul wrote in one of his final letters, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief' (1 Tim 1:15). If, as I am sure he did, Paul believed this sincerely, then he could not say it coldly. He meant every word of it with a breast-beating grief over his sin."

i. Question Nine: Are you a quicker forgiver?

p. 113 – 114 "Three times in the Gospels Jesus directly connects our forgiveness of others with God's forgiveness of us—Mark 11:25-26, Matthew 6:14-15, and also Luke 6:37, where He says, 'Forgive, and you will be forgiven.' He did not mean that we earn God's forgiveness for the sins we commit against Him by granting forgiveness to others for their sins against us. That would make our salvation conditional upon doing something to earn it—in this case dispensing forgiveness to others. Rather, these texts show that a forgiving spirit characterizes those who have been forgiven. Repenters toward God are forgivers toward others. Those who find themselves unable to forgive reveal that they've never experienced the transforming forgiveness of God. ...And this grace causes them to truly want to forgive, even when the flesh rages against that impulse."

j. Question Ten: Do you yearn for heaven and to be with Jesus?

p. 121 "Those who have been on a long pilgrimage increasingly desire to reach their destination, especially one as glorious and excellent as Heaven. Those who have spent decades loving and living for Jesus naturally long to see Him. While it's obvious that such anticipation should characterize those older believers living right on the borders of Heaven, these yearnings surge in the hearts of all growing Christians."

What does it look like to plateau in your spiritual life?

"A plateau can happen in many areas of our lives when we no longer progress in something. The dictionary defines a plateau as a land area having a relatively level surface raised above adjoining land... It is also described as a state of little or no

change following a period of activity or progress. A plateau can be described as period of no apparent progress in an individual's learning, marked by an inability to increase speed." Ernestine Graham, Blog 5/10/18.

"It's easier to keep going with the status quo than it is to pause and consider whether the path we're on is the most fruitful. Take our spiritual life, for example. We can easily get into a pattern of attending church, doing ministry, putting in a certain amount of time reading the Word and praying.

"We can go through the motions, but is the heart really seeking to know Jesus better through the time we invest in activities that appear spiritual..."

"Spiritually speaking, if we invest our spiritual energies without really considering the primary goal of knowing Jesus better, then we'll end up draining our spiritual resources... If our spiritual life isn't deepening our connection with Jesus the Vine, then we, the branches, will dry up." Erin Keeley Marshall; Guideposts Blog.

3 John 1:2 (NIV) Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

Do you think plateauing in their Christian lives is a problem for many Christian seniors? Why or why not?

How do seniors stay fresh in their spiritual lives?

What happens after 16,000 (52 x 6 x 52) quiet times? What happens after 3,000 (65 x 52) church services?

D. It is about people... Staying Close to Family and Friends...

Kids and Grandkids... Are you investing in your kids and grandkids?

Why Children are Our Most Valuable Investment

"When talking about finances, we inevitably get around to discussing investments, and in the case of our children, Psalms 127:3 says in the NKJV, "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward." And the NLT says it this way, "Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from Him."

"Our children are gifts from God which means we must take those gifts and invest in them to grow them to maturity. Financial verbiage is definitely being used. Maturity and investment are finance words along with "reward" and "grow." You were a financier in your children's lives when they were young, and now you have become a financial adviser as they are on their own, building their children and families.

"While your children were young, you were investing time and energy (along with lots of money) to grow them to maturity. 'Maturity' in the Merriam-Webster dictionary means full development, and in the Bible, it refers to spiritual development and growth. Our goal as parents is to raise our children to live for the Lord and live prosperous and fulfilling lives. This, of course, is not just prosperity in the money sense, but in every area of their lives as it says in III John 2, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." Just as our Heavenly Father wants this for us, we want this for our children. Building your children and your family is the most important heritage you can be passing on to your children." Jaida Campbell; Crosswalk Blog; 11/18/21

3 John 1:4 (NIV) I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Note: In this verse John is speaking of his spiritual children but it applies to both physical and spiritual children.

Psalm 127:1-5 (NIV) Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. ² In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat-- for he grants sleep to those he loves. ³ Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. ⁴ Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

E. Investing in others... Ministry... Helping others to grow in Christ...

Hey, God can use us, you, and me, in the lives of others...

Isaiah 43:4 (NIV) Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.

Isaiah 50:4 (NIV) The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

"The Bible frequently uses the word 'walk' to describe our relationship with God. For example, Genesis 6:9 says that 'Noah walked with God.' The verb 'walk' communicates that Noah's life with Him is, as Eugene Peterson puts it, 'a lifelong, companionable, conversational friendship with God.'

“I think the image of walking with friends is a wonderful picture of discipling... A disciple is someone committed to living Jesus’ way of life and embracing His mission. Making disciples was high on Jesus’ priority list, and He wants it to be a high priority for us...”
Bill Mowry; *Walk With Me*; p. 12.

“Discipling should not be reserved for ministry professionals or a select spiritual few. Discipling should be practiced by everyday believers in the everyday routine of where we live, work, play, or study. Discipling starts when we intentionally invite people to walk with us.

“When we invite people to walk with us in the way of Jesus, we’re inviting them to a heart-to-heart relationship done slowly with the Holy Spirit’s help, which takes us and others to a greater depth in Christ...”

“Walks are adventures. We never know what we might see, hear, or feel as we walk with God and with one another. When you invite people to walk with you as you walk with Jesus, you’re entering a God-filled adventure.”

Bill Mowry; *Walk With Me*; p. 13-14.

“To disciple people this way means simplifying and de-professionalizing discipling.

“By simplifying, I mean stripping the practice down to its bare essentials—allowing discipling to be accessible for many. When we de-professionalize the Great Commission, we remove it from the hands of ministry professionals and turn it over to everyday people. To do this, we must circle back to some fundamental biblical principles and practices. We need to see discipling as an invitation to follow Christ together, inviting people to walk with us in this life with Jesus...”

“Jesus doesn’t want skilled experts or know-it-alls but people who extend the invitation with humility. Our inability becomes an opportunity for the Lord to show His ability. We invite people to walk with us because we focus not on ourselves but on the person we’re inviting them to follow: the Lord Jesus.”

Bill Mowry; *Walk With Me*; p. 21-22.

“...if we’re honest, we all have doubts about whether we’re qualified to invite someone to walk with us. We wonder if we can be obedient to His command. However, one action does stand out with the eleven: whatever their doubts, they showed up... and so can we!

“How does Jesus counter their doubts? He gave this small group of friends two assurances in Matthew 28. First, He promised that His authority would be with them no matter where they go (Mt 28:18). Second, He promised to be present with them no matter where they go (Mt 28:29).

“...There are no little people in God’s eyes. In fact, our Lord seems to delight in using ‘little’ people, ordinary, live-next-door, regular kind of people. These are people like the eleven disciples...”

Bill Mowry; *Walk With Me*; p. 23-24.

F. Friends... Investing in our relationships...

John 15:15 (NIV) I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

“When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”
Henri Nouwen

“Friendship is one of the greatest gifts a human being can receive. It is a bond beyond common goals, common interests, or common histories... Friendship is being with the other in joy and sorrow, even when we cannot increase the joy or decrease the sorrow. It is a unity of should that gives nobility and sincerity to love. Friendship makes all of life shine brightly. Blessed are those who lay down their lives for their friends.”
Henri Nouwen

A final thought...

“When I trust deeply that today God is truly with me and holds me safe in a divine embrace, guiding every one of my steps I can let go of my anxious need to know how tomorrow will look, or what will happen next month or next year. I can be fully where I am and pay attention to the many signs of God’s love within me and around me.”

Henri Nouwen