

Introduction: Americans are not flourishing

- Anxiety and depression rate are at an all time high
- Less and less kids are reaching basic competencies in math and reading – other nations are screaming past us
- Racism seems to be increasing since 2010 rather than declining
- Fentanyl has killed over 100,000 people this year
- Inflation is killing us at the gas pump and grocery store
- The national debt is out of control and neither party stops spending when they are in charge

And yet, there is one subset of people who are flourishing in the midst of all of this chaos. This comes from a Gallup poll, NBC News and Harvard University. And lets just say, these are not exactly Christian institutions – although Harvard did start that way.

Here is the bottom line: When it comes to life satisfaction, NBC reports a Gallup survey that said only 51% of Americans are very satisfied with their lives, but 67% of weekly worship attenders are. Attending worship in fact, is a better prediction of flourishing than any other factor – including making over \$100,000 per year.

Tyler Vanderweel – Flourishing

Harvard Study

- *Five realms of flourishing*
- *Four drivers of flourishing*
- *Most significant driver*
- *Look at various application during this series, but here are two: family and satisfying relationships.*

Roses – Languishing vs. Flourishing – Then Cars – Then beard

And, I am not surprised because:

God wants his people to flourish. And I want you to flourish too. Flourishing is not the mission of the church – making disciples who follow Jesus is. BUT, flourishing is a key side effect. And it is on God’s agenda.

- **Psalm 1115:14 May the Lord cause you to flourish, both you and your children.** Now, I know some people don’t have children, or you are children, or you have grandhchidren. But it is our theme verse because it speaks to this generation AND the next. It is not just for “us” corporately, it is for us and the next generation – corporately. SO YOUR children is like all-yall’s kids together. So lets say that together and commit this to memory this month.
- **Wear a temporary tattoo.** It will remind you that God meant for you to flourish. It will help you memorize your verse. It will make people around you ask questions “YOU got a tattoo?” Nah, just temporary. It reminds me that God made us to flourish. What does that mean?

- Grandma age? Shock your grandkids
- Jesus said this to his disciples too. The enemy comes to steal kill and destroy. And the enemy is having a heyday in our culture. **But, Jesus says “I have come that you might have life- and have it to the full!” – John 10:10 Now Tyler has a pretty good definition of flourishing, but God’s is even better.**

WE were created for a certain state of being- Shalom. That is the word that is translated well as “Flourish” in psalm 115. Have you heard of it? Jewish people use it as a greeting and a goodbye. SHALOM! You may have heard it in reference to the term ‘peace’, and that is correct... but it is so much more! So much more... It embodies the idea of ‘rightness’, wholeness, or flourishing. It is the way God designed it to be.

- Shalom – 237 times in the Hebrew
 - You will die in Shalom
 - We send you away in peace/ Shalom
 - Is it well (shalom) with him?
 - Your father is alive and well (shalom)
 - I will give you peace (shalom) in the land
 - May the Lord give you his peace (shalom)
 - Shalom comes in rebuilding, in rest, in reconciliation
 - Shalom is “all is well” It is actually well translated as “Flourishing” – it is when things are working in the way God designed them – prospering, functioning, safe, not broken, not at war, in harmony.

God’s normal is healing, wholeness, love, peace, joy, prospering. We will never experience this fully in this world. But we yearn for God’s normal to be more prevalent in our soul and in our society.

I know what some of you may be saying “Wait a minute, we just finished a series on JOB – eight weeks of suffering and evil. How can you say that God’s agenda is flourishing? Great question.

God’s agenda for 80 or so years is not to pull us OUT of a sin stained world. It is his agenda ultimately upon our death or the return of Jesus, but for now, his goal is to infuse his flourishing INTO a sin stained world. It is to create a rescue mission for the poor and the crippled and the broken hearted and suffering. His is inputting his goodness into a broken realm. And you are his vessel to do so. He uses brokenness to bring about flourishing and he sends us to impact the broken. So we will be looking at flourishing in two stages – First, how our lives, centered on the prince of Shalom can embody the flourishing of our prince in our own habits and patterns. Second, how we can infuse this into a world that needs light and health and peace and wisdom.

Diagram 1

It all begins with the Prince of Shalom. You know. And his name shall be called wonderful, counselor, almighty God, everlasting father... prince of Shalom. Jesus knew that this was a wrecked world. And he parachuted into our backyard in order to establish a beachhead for shalom. He brought healing where there was disease, sight where there was blindness, love where there was hatred, and hope where there was hopelessness.

Everything that touched him flourished! And there are four factors – consistent in the Bible and consistent in the surveys that bring about flourishing.

Community of Shalom – The first is community. People who have healthy marriages, stable families and deep intimate friendships tend to be flourishing. More on this later in the message, but this is the first and statistically most significant factor.

- **Divine Encounter Shalom** – The second is divine encounters. In the garden of Eden, we walked with God. In the New Jerusalem, we will see his face. It is the defining characteristic. Isaiah 51:3 speaks of the yearning of this restoration.

Knowing the God of the universe, experiencing his love and his grace and his power is the key to your internal flourishing. That will be week 2.

Character of Shalom – When your inner world, matches your outer aspirations, there is peace. When your true self is a mismatch for who you present yourself as publicly, you have a tension that is unresolved. You cannot have shalom because there is inner turmoil. Week 3.

And **Shalom Meaning and Purpose** – I am very excited for Nancy Davies to be teaching this on Labor Day weekend. People who have a purpose that aligns with God’s purpose and can give to it every day are full of Shalom purpose. And Nancy Davies will be teaching this concept on September 3 for us.

This is weeks one to four and I’ll have a new diagram for weeks five and six... but you’ll have to come back to see it!

Back to the Community of Shalom – God is always building this stuff. I want to take you in the way back machine to the time that the Israelites have just finished their 40 years wandering in the desert. They are standing on the mountains of Moab, looking across the Jordan at the promised land (Map?). And Moses drops a speech just before he dies that is now known as the book of Deuteronomy. In Chapter 30, he gives them keys to flourishing.

¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

God is saying “It’s not that hard...obey me and you can flourish!”

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

Ever notice that the Jewish people still exist while surrounding nations don’t?

Did you ever notice that the Israelites were always called to stuff as a COMMUNITY. That Israel was blessed or blamed as a COMMUNITY. When Jesus called his disciples, he had 12 – and 70 – a COMMUNITY. When the church was formed, there were 3000 in one day. When the letters were written

that now make up our New Testament, they were written to churches or people who lead churches. There is not a 'letter to the *lone ranger Christian* at Ephesus. It is always the *church* at Ephesus.

Lets look at two applications:

God has two families for you. Your biological family and your church family. They are both components of helping you flourish. When one is down, the other can pick you up. And it is a key to flourishing because you were literally made for it.

You were designed by God for community

- God himself IS community – Father, Son and Spirit. We were made to reflect him. If you are a part of community, you are aligned with your design. When you are out of community, you are out of God's design for you.
- Have you ever noticed that Boredom stinks? Ever noticed that loneliness hurts? In fact, Americans go to extreme lengths to NOT feel boredom and loneliness.
- One of the alternatives to loneliness and boredom is rich relationships. God made us to have a few people in our lives that are a delight to us and that are delighted when we show up. God is good this way. He creates a HUNGER for intimacy that can be fulfilled in HIM (next week) and in community.
 - So God gave Israel families and clans. Later he gave us the church. He did this so we could flourish in community.
 - Jesus called 12 disciples – a community
 - Church was established with 3000 in one day
 - The Bible is packed with commands that end with 'one another' – it presupposes that there is another to one-another. We all need to love one another, pray for one another, confess to one another, serve one another and know one another!
 - Of all the institutions in the city... think about it... who provides community? Some sports, some workplaces, but the biggest and most effective is The church! Hundreds of thousands of people found friends and community in the church..
- This gets real when life gets tough. You always want to have community in place BEFORE a crisis hits. Scott Wallingford did. He is a guy about my age whose wife Shannon died of cancer way too young. He texted me this week and said *"In the last 14 months since Shannon's passing, I have obviously been on a journey and God's presence has been felt all around me. I'm not sure you're aware of this, but I was also diagnosed with cancer about a month before Shannon passed. I've had surgery and radiation treatments. The doctors tell me everything is good. Being part of our Journey group, Men of God, and CCC has been exactly where I know God wanted me to be during this time in my life. My journey group has been my own personal "small church family" and the members of that group have been faithful in prayer and support of my family and I. I am grateful for our church and the leadership as well as the community that we are all living in together in Christ.* And as for me, I am so glad that Scott was IN groups that would care for him!

So...

- Ask yourself "Am I in a flourishing community?" If yes, then you get this.

- IF not...Join a group at CCC – you were made for relationships. A thousand people in a worship center are not that relational. You were meant for a small group of people – people who will listen to your story, give you feedback, share the Christian worldview, love you unconditionally. Do you have those people?
- The best way to meet people is join a group. It takes time, but it is so worth it.
 - Men – Men of God – here is the story, men, You need friendships, support, advice... people to mentor and people who will mentor you. Your you don't have this kind of community, Men of God is your onramp! Fridays, 6am in the student center starting after Labor Day.
 - Adults – Community groups or mid-sized groups. Every night of the week – couples, singles, young adults, seniors... you name it. There is a place for you!
 - Students – amazing ministry – fun, age appropriate, great friendships. My kids best friends came from the CCC ministry and I'd like the same for you and you and you. If you are a student or have a student, tonight is kickoff night!
- Groups – Over 150 in the church. Hard to coordinate, but there are three ways you can find one.
 - Hub
 - Atrium – you can't miss the mega sandwich boards! Look for people with lanyards for coaching and to meet someone.
 - Web- cccomaha.info

The other reason that church people have higher life satisfaction rates, according to the Harvard Research is that church people have better marriages and lower divorce rates.

Shaunti Feldhaun, Harvard educated marriage researcher – “The good news about marriage” did research that indicates that the divorce rate is actually not nearly the 50% stat that is common in the media.

- Divorce rate for first time marriages – 30%
- Divorce rate for people who attend church – 17%. Not just people who 'say they are Christian... but people who attend church regularly.
- Marriages do better in a broader community. Marriages do better when God is at the center. Marriages do better when you have divine resources to pray into your family. Marriage do better when people are living with godly character. Of course only half as many church families get divorced.
- Who helps marriages? Churches! Here at CCC, we add resources that make a difference.
 - Premarital Counseling/tests/weddings
 - Marriage Groups – like REAL Marriage
 - Marriage Crisis Groups
 - Pastoral and professional counseling
 - Divorce Care
- Why great marriages are good for kids – Sources, families.com, ellomotherhood.com, benefitof.net
 - Lower risk taking – drugs, sex,
 - Better health
 - Lower levels of depression, anxiety,

- Emotionally closer to both parents
- Less likely to divorce
- Less likely to experience poverty
- Higher education levels
- This is why kids raised in healthy marriages grow up so much stronger and the church is committed to healthy marriages
- Sidenote – single parenting is hard and single parents are heroes. This is one reason why we need the church to be a community for single dads and single moms. And single parents will be the first to say – do what you can to preserve marriages. Because doing this alone is hard!

Friends – In order to be flourishing, you need to be in a healthy community. Take advantage of the church resources designed for community! You won't regret that you did