

What do you see when you think "Flourishing"?

A **magnificent tree** growing in open space and fertile ground, healthy, luscious and growing to its full potential. (PIC 1).

But also a tree, perhaps not given the space or nutrition it requires but nevertheless thriving, like this **tree growing out of a wall!** (PIC 2).

Read Genesis 1-3 and you will see a picture of flourishing! Genesis 1:28 "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, **"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it;"**

Man was made and commanded to flourish!

Jesus said in Luke 13:18-19, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."

The Kingdom of God is a picture of "flourishing".

What is human flourishing?

<http://www.summit.org/blogs/summit-announcements/want-to-win-the-culture-focus-on-human-flourishing/>

Some think it means to chase after happiness. Greek philosopher Aristotle explained flourishing as the pursuit of virtue and excellence, not the mere pursuit of personal pleasure.

Biblically, human flourishing is tied to the concept of *shalom*. Theologian Cornelius Plantinga puts it this way:

In the Bible, *shalom* means universal *flourishing, wholeness, and delight* — a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, ... inspiring joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior ... welcomes creatures in whom he delights.

When Adam and Eve **sinned**, God's blessing of *shalom* was frustrated. Adam's loving, affirming and flourishing environment was replaced by domination, envy, suspicion, competition and frustration.

That place of frustration:

ME: Our first few years back in Melbourne. Australia was in recession, hard to find work, financially strapped, coping with a young family, away from friends and family - they were hard years, lacking much, it seemed. Making it worse was the fact that Malaysia, the country we left was experiencing unprecedented economic growth. I did not feel we were flourishing, felt demoralised most times.

YOU: Maybe you are in a less than flourishing environment at the moment.

- in a job that you are not enjoying, demeaning, stifling you physically, socially or intellectually.
- you are finding it "hard and unstimulated" as a stay-home mother.

- you are enrolled in a course or career that you are struggling to stay interested (part of you wants to break out and take the risk but you feel that you can't).
- you find that your home is not exactly the place for rest, recreation and refreshment.
- you are feeling sorry and disheartened that the illness you have has gone for too long.
- left wondering how and when you could be lifted from your financial challenges.

These are feelings of Suppression & Suffocation.....Slow Death.

Good news: Jesus said thieves come to kill, steal and destroy but he came to give life and life to the full.

HOW DOES GOD EXPECT ME TO FLOURISH IN UNCONDUCTIVE CONDITIONS?

Today, I would like to talk about **4 mindsets/attitudes** that are needed to flourish where you are.

Let me take you to Jeremiah 29:4-7

This letter was written by prophet Jeremiah in Jerusalem to a group of exiles in Babylon between the years 597-587BC. These people of God were forced to leave the stability of their own home and country into a land of their invaders. They don't want to be there and every day, their only prayer and wish was to be freed to go home, "get me out of here!" But this word came from God to them:

4 This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: 5 "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. 6 Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! 7 And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."

Under frustrating, hard and uncertain conditions, the word from the Lord, came to them in the tone of Genesis 1:28 "Be fruitful and multiply...."

"Today you might not feel like a tree planted in the open field, but like that tree on a crack in wall ...however, FLOURISH!"

How?

1. Build homes, and plan to stay.

Make long term plans for your life in Babylon! Like a tree, send your roots down---commit to your new country. Short term view of your stay, makes you reluctant to commit to build.

One of the best decision my wife and I made was to become naturalised as Aussies in 2004. As Malaysia does not recognise dual citizenship we had to relinquish Malaysian citizenship. But in the few years following, our ministry in the community flourished beyond imagination. Nothing of this one foot on each boat business, stopped envy, regrets.

The first mindset for a flourishing life is "THINK LONG TERM".

Are you still reminiscing how life was then, and what it might have been if things hadn't changed? If you want to flourish, change your mindset - THINK LONG TERM.

Some of you are afraid of making long term decisions - ask yourself, by deferring the decision, are you denying yourself of a flourishing life in the meantime? When you stop thinking of leaving, your eyes will suddenly see the many opportunities around you.

2. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce.

As exiles they had to take what is offered. If you are given a land, whether it is flat with fertile soil, or hilly with poor quality soil...you still have to eat, so you have to plant on whatever land you've got and eat the produce, no matter how luscious or pitiful they look.

ACCEPT THE CONDITIONS is the next mindset to a flourishing life.

Yes, having less maybe hard to get used to but then you are forced to depend on the provision of God and then you will be able to say like Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

My friend Prabakar was a passionate and highly qualified anthropologist in India. But he couldn't find that kind of work in Australia and what was given to him was a low ranking job in banking, he took it with thanks to God. Today he is a successful banker, but he is the same man – totally happy and content. Why, because like Paul, Prabakar learnt to be content, be thankful in *all circumstances*.

When we begin to accept the conditions, we will be able to do what Paul asks us to:

"Give thanks in all circumstances." (1 Thes 5:18)

=> This is the flourishing life - like the tree growing out of a wall! Having much is not the prerequisite to a flourishing life - but making the best use of what's given is!

3. Marry and have children. Multiply! Do not dwindle away.

The temptation when in frustrating and under-resourced circumstances is for a couple to delay marriage and having children. But God was encouraging the exiles "Multiply, not dwindle." In NIV it reads "Increase, do not decrease."

In Deuteronomy 7:9, God says "He is a faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations." He is faithful to you now and will be equally faithful to your children and then to your grandchildren.

The 3rd mindset to a flourishing life is this: PLAN TO INCREASE (not drawback)

=> Do you sometimes wonder what kind of a world our children and grandchildren will live in after we are gone. Will the uncertainty of the future discourage your desire of having a large/r family? "Be fruitful and multiply" is a mandate from God, plan for growth!

=> We don't have the money

=> We don't have the space (Church and Village Cinemas)

=> We don't have the energy (Story of Mulgrave and Oromo Church)

=> We don't have the

4. Work for peace and prosperity of the city.

The Lord called his people exiled in Babylon to work for the peace and prosperity of the city they are in. Not just for the peace and prosperity of themselves. Jesus said we are in the world but not off the world. We are to be different, but not called to avoid the world. NO, we are to contribute by our hard work to the betterment of all people, Christian or not. At a conference some time ago, I heard a senior manager of the ANZ Bank said that, because she did not possess the gifts and abilities for church ministry, she chose the second best option, which to work in a secular job. And so she thought that her service to God was to make money and give to missions. But as she matures in her faith she learnt later that she was gifted by God to be a talented business leader. Serving God in the bank is where she is called to be and do. She was beaming as she told her story - a picture of a God-loving woman flourishing inside and out.

The 4th critical mindset to a flourishing life is SERVE THE CITY. We are all made and gifted for good work that serves all people. Pastoring is a meaningful work but not the only godly work. By choosing to serve the city, you will begin to flourish in your gifts and talents and be God's blessing to this world.

Conclusion:

Are you feeling unfulfilled and dissatisfied? Are missing the fullness of meaningful work? God desires that His children will thrive and flourish even under difficult conditions, perhaps like a tree growing out of a wall. You can to flourish today by

1. THINKING LONG TERM,
2. ACCEPTING THE CONDITIONS,
3. PLANNING TO INCREASE,
4. SERVING THE CITY.

Your Lord desires that you, your family, your neighbourhood, your church to flourish. There is a great diversity of people and life experiences here, join hands to work together for the work of God. Like that tree flourishing out of a wall, you show everyone, that your God is good and generous – Flourish where you are.