

Day 1

Flourishing



Individual Reflection

Before we begin, let's start with a definition of flourishing:

To grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as a result of a particularly favorable environment.

What does it look like for you to flourish—to grow in a healthy way?

What makes an environment a healthy place for you to grow?

Take a minute to read this passage a few times, reflect on what it's really saying and what stands out to you. If you have your Bible and it's a different translation, read that one as well.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Philippians 3:7-11 ESV

This passage can be interpreted in many ways, depending on what season you're in and how that season is affecting you. When have you experienced loss that turned out to be really helpful for you? To flourish, you may have to lose worldly things and this could make your season of flourishing confusing and hurtful. It's important to remember that plants are primed to grow to their fullest. Just like plants, we undergo pruning so we can grow, too.

Comparison is hard and can make times of flourishing harder, especially when you compare your current season to past ones you've experienced. As people, we generally compare seasons of life to past similar ones. (And no season of flourishing looks identical between two people.) This summer, you may still be in a season of flourishing and just because it looks different doesn't mean it's bad, and doesn't mean you're not flourishing.

Each season you enter, but specifically each season of flourishing, will bring its own challenges. They'll also bring their own joys and things to praise. Remain faithful and know that pain in flourishing is pruning and the Lord helping you grow. Spend some time today reflecting on how God is helping you grow in this season.

Small Group Discussion

Writer Shauna Neiquist says this about empathy:

“Empathy is a sister to compassion. It’s a willing cracking open of the heart, over and over, an intentional tenderness of spirit. It takes discipline and bravery to practice empathy—it’s far easier to demonize the other when you focus on the differences and the distances, when you separate people into us vs. them.

“Empathy is choosing to see what connects us all: our common humanity. Our common resolve as well as our common fragility, our common grief and terror and exhaustion as well as our common hope and joy and delight.

“Empathy is when you see another person’s needs and longings as clearly as you see your own, when you feel another person’s wounds and scars as if they were wounds and scars on your very own body, your very own skin.”

It can be difficult to thing to see past differences, but when we do, we can bring the world together. Or, if not the whole world, as least our small pocket of the world. The world today is not exactly flourishing. We are not quite living in a favorable environment. The world is full of sickness, inequality, division, and weariness. This common grief can lead us to feel sad or tired. We could just ignore all those feelings, all that pain. Or, as Shauna Neiquist says, we can be disciplined and brave and seize this opportunity to practice empathy. Those feelings, however burdensome, set us up for extending empathy to one another.

Discussion Questions

- What would a world that is flourishing look like? You can use words, pictures, or actions to describe.
- Share recent examples of hope, joy, and delight that you have witnessed.
- How have you seen examples of people promoting our common humanity?
- How does extending empathy to another move us closer to living flourishing lives?
- What part can we play, as individuals and a group, to help our community flourish?

Worship Outline

Materials Needed

- Call & Response sheets
- Paper
- Envelopes
- Writing utensils

Call & Response

Leader: Lord, let your message be our firm foundation

People: Let our roots grow in the soil of your love

Leader: May we plant ourselves in your teachings

People: And grow with your guidance and patience

Leader: As we bloom and produce fruit we praise you

People: And offer all that we can in your holy name

Music Suggestions

Beautiful Things by Gungor

God of Wonders by Third Day

Message

Watch here - <https://youtu.be/CYmylaYW7II>

Sneak peek: Life is not supposed to be easy. And right now it can seem harder than most times. There is a chance this might be one of the larger struggles of our lifetimes. But you can still flourish. You have an opportunity now more than ever to be the light God wants to send in these hard times. You can be what everyone and everything around you needs and you may not even realize you are doing it. Be the best you can be to abound in every good work. My New Age Thessalonian friends, I pray for you and all of the good that you do for the body of God. No matter what it looks like, how it comes together, or how you feel about it God is with you. And with God all things are possible. Thank God for abstract concepts, unending wisdom and grace, and all of these inexpressible gifts.

Response

Just as Paul prayed for the Thessalonian church, so we too have people who have encouraged us from afar. People who have supported us, mentored us, and loved us. Who are those people in your life? Are they youth group leaders or teachers? Are they parents or grandparents? Are they older or younger than you? Take a moment to reflect on those who have made a difference in your life or in your spiritual journey. Who has been like a Paul to you?

As you begin to identify some influential mentors to you, write them a thank you note! Extend your gratitude to those who have helped you flourish, or who have been there when you were far from flourishing. Find ways you can pray for them, for their faithfulness and love!

Benediction

In these hard times of distance and seclusion, we can always be thankful. We can even be thankful for being thankful, and thankful that others are thankful. Your God loves flourishing children.