

Let's Flourish!

Introduction. “Flourishing” is becoming a buzz word and a very important concept today in psychological circles. Adam Grant wrote in *The New York Times*, “The psychology community calls this lofty combination of physical, mental, and emotional fitness ‘flourishing.’ It’s the exact opposite of languishing, that sense of stagnation.”

“Flourishing really is what people are ultimately after,” said Tyler J. VanderWeele, an epidemiology and biostatistics professor and director of Harvard’s Human Flourishing Program. “It’s living the good life. We usually think about flourishing as living in a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good — it’s really an all-encompassing notion.”

“Flourishing” evokes thoughts of being successful, prosperous, thriving, blooming, and growing. If we’re consistently sowing seeds for spiritual growth, we should be continually flourishing.

“Flourishing” is also a Bible word used several times in the Old Testament. In Psalm 92:12 the psalmist wrote, “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree.” The Hebrew word means “to bud, break forth, to blossom abundantly, to spread, to grow.”

The palm tree can grow to great heights and possesses the ability to bend, but not break. It can withstand fierce storms and snap back from adverse conditions. This sounds like good qualities for Christians living in a world fraught with sickness, suffering, sin, as well as enduring assaults on our faith. Additionally, the palm tree can flourish in desert conditions. It can find moisture below the surface of the burning sand as its roots grow deep to find nourishment. Likewise, when we are rooted, grounded, and established in the faith (Colossians 2:7), we’ll spiritually abound and flourish.

Many Christians fail to flourish and grow spiritually because they aren’t developing a closer, intimate relationship with the Lord. Superficial and surface Christianity won’t produce flourishing disciples.

The wise man also contrasts the state of the wicked and the righteous in this regard. Proverbs 11:28 says, “He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like foliage.” And Proverbs 14:11 adds, “The house of the wicked will be overthrown, But the tent of the upright will flourish.” These passages remind us not to view “flourishing” from a superficial, materialistic perspective based on wealth, pleasure, possessions, or an affluent lifestyle. Flourishing spiritually goes deeper. It feeds the spirit and meets the needs of the soul. It has an eternal viewpoint.

Clearly, as we head into the new year, we need to know how to flourish and what to get rid of in order to flourish more and more.

I. What You Need to Flourish

A. You need the Word.

1. Peter penned that we need to be like “newborn babes,” who “desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).
2. It’s often repeated refrain, but you can’t grow without God’s Word. Reading, studying, and meditating on it will stimulate your desire for growth. It’s the bread of life. The water that quenches your thirst. The lamp that lights your path. The medicine that heals your soul. The road map that leads to heaven.

3. You've got to find a way to regularly get into the Word. Read a little bit everyday. Listen to it on the way to work, while you're doing chores, or just relaxing around the house.
- B. You need prayer.
1. Jesus is our example in prayer. He prayed often to the Father (Matthew 14:23; Luke 9:28). In these times, we draw closer to God, feel His presence, and find the power to move forward.
 2. If your prayers feel stilted and stale, read some of David's prayers in the Psalms. Pray them. Make them your own. As he talked with God, he found strength, courage, and experienced deeper spiritual connection. Just look at his fervent desire reflected in Psalm 42:1-2.
- C. You need worship.
1. Have you ever attended a worship assembly when you didn't feel like it? Almost without exception, you felt better when you left. Why? Worship inspires, lifts, ennobles, challenges, encourages, enlivens, and refreshes.
 2. When "we worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 96:9), we fill our spiritual tank with fuel to face life's challenges and spiritually grow.
- D. You need fellowship.
1. God formed us for family and created us for community. We need each other. The "one another" commands offer instruction and insight into the power of mutual encouragement (Hebrews 10:25).
 2. The word "stimulate" is also translated "stir up," "spur one another on," "encourage," as well as "provoke" in the KJV.
 - a) It incites in a positive way. It speaks to sharpening one another to action.
 - b) When we neglect the fellowship of our brethren, we're depriving ourselves of chances for spiritually flourishing.
 3. Going back to the metaphor of the palm tree, a group of palm trees form an oasis. Together they provide shade from the scorching sun. In a similar way, when we flourish together, we help each other. The fellowship of the faithful becomes a refreshing oasis in a desert of sorrow and sin.
- E. You need music.
1. We think of music as something we do in the worship assembly when we "sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19) as we "teach and admonish one another" (Colossians 3:16).
 2. However, you don't have to attend worship assemblies to be inspired by spiritual songs. Stream psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs when you're driving. Additionally, YouTube offers some wonderful groups that will lift your spirits through a cappella singing.
 3. The Greek philosopher Plato once wrote, "Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything."

II. Hindrances to Flourishing

A. Excuses.

1. "The easiest way to avoid something is to make up an excuse for it," observed writer and blogger Alex Filipovic. We all do it occasionally. Some people do it habitually. And they do it to their own spiritual peril.

2. Jesus once told a parable about a great banquet to which people had been invited. They accepted the invitation, preparations had been made, but when the time came they began to make excuses (Luke 14:16-24).
 3. Jesus compares these flimsy, frivolous excuses to those who ignore the King's invitation to come to kingdom banquet.
 - a) Someone might say, "I've accepted the invitation. I'm a Christian. I go to church every Sunday." Yes, but are you feasting on the Word? Are you participating in the banquet? Are you partaking of the spiritual feast to aid your growth? Not just on Sunday, but every day of the week?
 - b) Can you imagine attending a sumptuous banquet feast, but sitting at the table and not eating? That's why some Christians aren't flourishing, because they're not imbibing the spiritual nourishment available. And why? There are many excuses for not flourishing:
 - (1) "I don't have time."
 - (2) "There are hypocrites in the church holding me back."
 - (3) "The preaching is poor."
 - (4) "The preacher made me mad."
 - (5) "The shepherds aren't leading."
 - (6) "The church is small."
 - (7) "People aren't friendly."
 - (8) "I don't know how."
 4. All of these and more are excuses. And as Billy Sunday once defined it, an excuse is "the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie."
- B. Bad habits.
1. To flourish spiritually, the Bible says that there are some things that we need to "put off" that will hinder our spiritual progress (Colossians 3:5).
 2. Are you holding on to habits from the past? Are there some attitudes and thinking patterns that are hampering your advancement? Are there some behaviors that are curbing your desire for spiritual realities?
 3. As Sean Covey observed, "We become what we repeatedly do." Is what you're doing on a daily basis holding you back from becoming what Christ called you to be?
- C. Bad relationships.
1. An unhealthy relationship may belittle your beliefs, sabotage your faith, or make you feel guilty for pursuing spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 15:33). Solomon warned his son to avoid sinners who would entice him to engage in ungodly activities (Proverbs 1:10-19).
 2. Jesus even said that following Him may require giving up close relationships in our own family — maybe a father, or mother, or brother or sister, or son or daughter (Matthew 10:34-39).
 - a) In fact, He said that your enemies may even be from your own household.
 - b) Therefore, people who fail to support your attempts to flourish, and even stymie your discipleship, must either be eliminated from your life, or kept at a healthy distance.

3. Regardless of where you are on your spiritual journey, you can begin now to grow. As Carl Bard observed, "Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, my friend, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending."

D. Fear.

1. I haven't counted them, but it's been said that there are 365 admonitions in the Bible to "fear not." Maybe one for every day of the year?
2. Katy Medrano published an article called the "Top 10 Strong Human Fears." She explains them in detail, but they're pretty self-explanatory:
 - a) Failure.
 - b) Death.
 - c) Rejection.
 - d) Ridicule.
 - e) Loneliness.
 - f) Misery.
 - g) Disappointment.
 - h) Pain.
 - i) The unknown.
 - j) Losing your freedom.
3. Fear will negatively impact every area of your life, and it will impede, if not totally negate, your capability to flourish. The one talent man in Jesus' parable failed to grow his talent, because he admitted and lamented, "I was afraid" (Matthew 25:25).
 - a) Fear paralyzed him. What was he afraid of? Afraid of making a mistake? Afraid of failure? Afraid he didn't measure up to the five talent man?
 - b) Regardless, Jesus condemned the fearful man who wouldn't give up his fear. He called him a "wicked and lazy servant."
4. Don't allow fear to foil your flourishing. Give it up and remember that God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7).

E. Worry.

1. The problem of worry is as old as humankind. People worry about the stock market, job security, the moral condition of our world, upcoming elections, health issues, computer viruses, tax deadlines, parenting problems, marital conflicts, identity theft, national security, and saving enough for retirement. The list is endless.
2. Of course, every age has had its own pressures and problems to cope with. Jesus' day was no different. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, the Master addressed the issue of worry (Matthew 6:19-34).
3. Overcoming worry begins with ordering our priorities correctly. The Lord precedes His admonition, "Do not worry" with three spiritual principles:
 - a) When my values are right, I won't worry about unimportant things in life.
 - b) When my vision is clear, I won't worry about the distractions of life.
 - c) When my Master is God, I won't worry about who's in control of my life.
4. Worry wastes time that could be profitably invested in "growing in grace and in knowledge" (2 Peter 3:18). Worry will weaken your worship, disrupt your

discipleship, diminish your ministry, decrease your joy, and delay your spiritual flourishing.

Conclusion. The most popular new year resolutions are to lose weight, exercise, and eat healthy. Consider a spiritual approach: 1) I will lose the weight of sin (Hebrews 12:1; Colossians 3:5-11); 2) I will exercise higher discernment (Hebrews 5:14; Psalm 119:125); and, 3) I will eat the healthy Word of God (Jeremiah 15:16; 1 Peter 2:2).

As we grow older, our role and position in the kingdom may change, but our responsibility to be faithful remains the same. Stay connected to Christ. Be prayerful. Remain “in the house of the Lord.” There are ways for you to flourish in the new year. Flourish, don’t flounder.

I am deeply indebted to Ken Weliever for the use of his material.