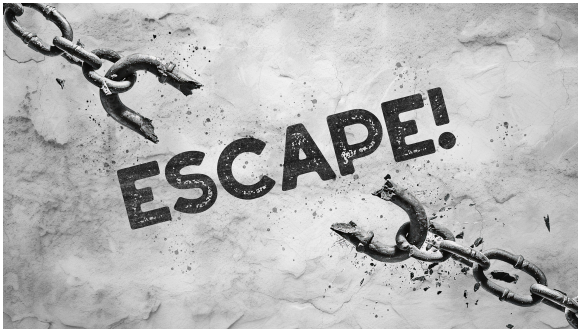




The difference between godly flourishing and worldly flourishing

By Hannah Dawson

Flourish. When you read the word, what is the first thought that pops into your mind? Do you think of a lush garden ripe with fruits and veggies? Or a wealthy person who can provide for his family? Or the Starbucks cup from last Christmas with “Flourish” written in fancy lettering?

According to Dictionary.com, “to flourish” means “to be in a vigorous state; thrive; to be in its or in one’s prime; prosper; to grow luxuriantly; to make dramatic, sweeping gestures.” (Personally, I resonate with the last one. If flourishing means being dramatic, then I must flourish every day. But I digress.)

The word “flourish” also gets thrown around a lot in Christian circles. Flourishing is a desirable trait for those who are in Christ. If we are in Christ and live according to His Word, we think, we will flourish in our work, ministry and family.

But what does it really mean to flourish? And is this even a biblical concept?

Indeed, the Bible speaks about flourishing. In the NASB, there are 15 usages of the English word “flourish” and its variations. And if we look over the verses on flourishing, we will notice an interesting pattern, especially in the Psalms and Proverbs: The Bible speaks of flourishing in discussions about the righteous and wicked.

Proverbs 11:28 and 14:11 specifically discuss the contrast between the wicked and the righteous. While the wicked lose all they have and they are ultimately destroyed, the righteous flourish and will be established. Psalm 72:7 likewise says, “In his days may the righteous flourish, And abundance of peace till the moon is no more.”

The righteous flourish because God is with them. On the other hand, other verses say the wicked flourish too. Why would the wicked flourish too?

God’s definition of flourishing is much different.

Worldly Flourishing

I don’t know about you, but there are so many times I look at the world and see so many other people flourish while I feel like I’m drowning. Non-believers at my work talk of building a pool in the backyard of their brand new house with their three dogs — all while I’m over here like, “I’m still in campus housing with a part-time job while my husband and I go to school... And we have a puppy.”

In my mind, I should have all those things they do because I'm righteous, right? I'm in Christ. I read my Bible every day. I'm active in my church. Where's my house and pool and doggy door so I don't have to take my puppy out to pee at 6 am? That's flourishing, right? It's having everything I'd ever need to make my life convenient, comfortable, and easy.

Though part of me wishes that were true, I can simply look at some of the most godly people in my life to realize that couldn't further from God's plan. No doubt, God wants us to flourish. Those who are righteous flourish; that's a biblical precedent. But God's definition of flourishing is much different.

What we have in Christ is so much more, so much better.

Godly Flourishing

Psalms 92 has the most direct references to "flourish" than any other chapter in the Bible. When we look at this psalm, it's amazing to see that it begins and ends with God's goodness, His provision and His righteousness. For this, we are told it is good to give thanks and sing praises because of His faithfulness.

We learn that the wicked flourish for a while, only to be struck down later for their lack of faith and faithfulness to God. Their wickedness condemned them, and their flourishing was short-lived. Later, though, it says the righteous will flourish like the palm tree and cedar in Lebanon. Trees are stable, long-lasting plants, and the longer they live, the more they tend to flourish, both in fruit and through adversity.

Verse 13 then says, "Planted in the house of the Lord, They will flourish in the courts of our God." Take a moment to let that sink in. Not only are we like trees, sturdy and constant, but we are planted before the Lord. In His presence. There we flourish, there we thrive, there we have life everlasting.

This is the part where I stand in awe and humility. Flourishing doesn't have to mean having everything that would make us comfortable. That would be what the wicked so often have. Flourishing isn't even in the worldly domain. The promise of flourishing is one that is greater than this world, more lofty, more eternal.

Does this mean that Christians don't experience flourishing now? Not at all. In fact, as soon as we are in Christ, we receive a dose of this flourishing now. No, our flourishing won't always look like the world's, but would we really want that? Would we exchange the eternal thriving in God's presence for comfort and plenty now — especially when we know that kind of human flourishing only ends in being cut down like grass? What we have in Christ is so much more, so much better.

When I begin to ask if God is really providing my flourishing when I don't have a pool, I need to take a step back and recognize that my flourishing comes from the gift of being planted in God's presence. How could I ever ask for more when I know that I will be in the house of the Lord and the court of God for the rest of eternity? Let us live in the peace and knowledge that we flourish when we live out the truth of our planter – God Himself.