

## “Thrive”: Forging a Vital Faith, Prologue

Text: Genesis 12:1-9

1.13.19



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

***“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”*** (Matthew 19:16) It’s the question posed to Jesus in the first century. It’s the question (and the quest) of humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*“How would you define the good life? What is the life that works?”*

*“What are the means you are using to attain it? Would you say that your present pursuits are allowing you to experience it or simply frustrating your efforts?”*

*“How would you say the current culture would answer that question?”*

We live in a world that is ultimately confused about how to define the ‘admirable’ life; no real consensus about what it looks like or how to attain it, other than our own individual preferences and interpretations.

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### Teaching Notes...

*“What would it look like to be the people of God in a culture and context (time and place), who adopt certain practices and rhythms of grace which turn us toward God (repentance), demonstrate to the world that he is “real” (confession) and invites them to trust another story for their lives (faith)?”*

But...

It’s a struggle to live in a highly polarized culture; to live in a world-in-conflict without becoming fearful or paranoid.

It’s a struggle to remain committed (to anything) in a world that so quickly surrenders to personal comfort.

How do we continue to embrace our need for prayer in a solutions-oriented culture?

How can I live with depth and solitude in a world that keeps us entertained and distracted?

Is it possible to maintain “purity” without becoming rigid-moralists?

How can I be expected to find community in a culture of individualism and self-interest?

Can I really remain confidently and humbly committed to Christ, and even make claims on truth without becoming arrogant and isolated?

**The Story says that the world functions best when humans are in right relationship with God and each other, and are lovingly ruling over (stewarding) all that is rightfully his... but has been entrusted to us.**

Deep within all of us are desires for living humanly (flourishing; becoming who we were created to be) which eventually either get connected to our Creator-God or attached to any number of seemingly attractive options which leave us discontent and disoriented.

**This journey is to have our desires ‘re-directed’. It is not to live without passion (without heart; apathetically). That would be inhumane.**

It is the same desires that lead us away from God that he uses to draw us back to himself.

The theme of the entire Story is that the whole of creation is currently not experiencing its “former glory”, meaning, it is not a good reflection of what it was meant to be. Everywhere we turn, we not only encounter trace- evidence of glory, but undeniable expressions of disorder and disruption. “*Sin-graffiti*” all over God’s good artistry.

“*All have sinned and fallen short...*” Romans 3:23

It says that we have failed to live up to the dream of God and everything has suffered, as a result. This, I contend, is the source of all our longings--- all of our desires--- and the subsequent frustration that we experience.

**It’s a world in which we are not simply anticipated to ‘survive’, but to ‘flourish’.**

“**flourish**”: *to break forth* (Psalms 72:7; 92:12,13; Proverbs 14:11; Isaiah 66:14) *to bloom* (Psalms 72:16; 90:6; 92:7; 103:15; 132:18). The word is used as a descriptor for “*grace*”, for “*blessing*”, for “*salvation*”.

**Despite the philosophical arguments to the contrary, the history of mankind is not one of “progress”.**

Some centuries ago, humanity diverted from the notion of a “**grand story**”--- an **epic narrative** which made sense of everything in our lives and helped us to answer the really significant life-questions (Who am I? Where am I? Why am I here? What happened?). That epic story had God as its author and central character.

When we factor out God, we are diminished and our souls get smaller. Instead of a legacy where we are the unique, image-bearing reflection of a good, Creator-God, we simply become **sperm and eggs**. It doesn't make for as good a story! It's not as “glorious”.

**There is a wandering that is provoked by restlessness and discontent and there is a journey that is compelled by discovery.**

**Discontent** always reveals the superficiality of our heart-attachments and their inability to address the dissatisfaction.

**Discovery** is always associated with the “*more than*”. It is the God-initiated restlessness which can only be satisfied by obedience. In these instances, the journey is not an anxious attempt to compensate for what we feel that we are lacking/missing, but the courage which is fostered by “the call”.

**Christianity provides not merely a set of God-demands to be met, but a vision for the life we were meant to live and the heart-remedy necessary for us to realize it.**

Transformation: the “welcome back” to who you were always meant to be!

**Our journey has always been offered to us within the imagery of this movement “from” something, “to” something, primarily centered in the Exodus story--- from captivity to freedom.**

Freedom is always a movement out of something old and dysfunctional and strangely comfortable, to what is new and healing and risky and liberating. Paul offers Abram as the progenitor (Father) of our faith; the prime example of how we come to this salvation.

Christian faith has never been a static location (decision, doctrinal stance), but a spiritual journey (“*leave*”, “*go*”, “*enter*”, “*increase*”, “*possess*”). It's not in the ideation (formation of ideas). It's not in the decision (choose). It's in the movement! It's in the leaving. The transformation is in the journey.

The journey is not about wandering. It is purposed in nature. It's not just about ‘setting out’, but setting out in discovery: “*a land to which I will guide you*” (Genesis 12).

To leave and go is to willingly abandon our own agenda and self-directed pursuits and defer to a good God. It is to learn the discomfort of the unfamiliar. It is to be

uncertain as to where you are going, but not feel lost. It is to learn to trust a different set of resources, other than your own instincts and impulses.

Because faith is offered to us as a 'way'--- a journey--- it defies our attempts at standardizing it. As much as we would desire for Paul, or one of the other NT writers, to provide a summary chapter with the (5) steps to spiritual vitality or some course syllabus, we are offered none.

**Every time we 'set out', we broaden the possibilities for our lives. Every time we risk leaving our own self-defined, self-sufficient state, we make ourselves available to an influence--- a means of flourishing--- which had always been available, but had not been rightly (right-fully) accessed. The Bible calls it "grace".**

*Woodinville Alliance Church... a community where every person discovers who they really are in Christ, experiences his goodness, and shares this life-changing encounter with their world so that others might value and choose Jesus for themselves.*

The flourish framework (movement-markers) are not movements toward something new and innovative. They are radically (root) restorative-movements meant to re-align and re-orient us with our creative purpose.

**We are most fully human when...**

We are losing confidence in 'self' and gaining confidence in God.

**[Self-reliance to God-reliance]**

We are centered in our status as the "beloved" and are confident enough to allow others "in" and to let ourselves "out".

**[Isolation to Belonging]**

We are breaking free of the limitations of fear by entrusting ourselves to God and trusting ourselves with God.

**[Fear to Trust]**

Our responses to God (and others) are better characterized as 'compelling' rather than 'obligatory'.

**[Duty to Delight]**

We "image" God; when we represent him and his desires well and live lives which make him attractive and available.

**[Insignificance to Purpose]**

As broken people on our way to restoration, we can link ourselves to the needs of our near-ones and serve them in ways which lend to their shalom.

**[Brokenness to Wholeness]**

**If you can't claim the truth of your brokenness, deeply, you'll settle for being improved, not renewed.**

**If you don't claim the truth of the love of God for you, deeply, you'll give yourself, tirelessly, to securing the love that is already yours.**

It is the love that both allows us to come to terms with our brokenness and becomes the source of our healing.

**God inspires the journey. God directs the journey. God is both the journey itself and the destination.**

The goal was never the "land of promise". The goal (was to trust this God; to surrender to this way.

God's agenda is not the 'blessing to the world' through you. God's agenda (his guilty pleasure) is you! It's to bless you. He knows that the inevitable consequence of your experience of him will be the blessing made present to and available for others.