

3. God's presence to nourish and heal

Tending the Soul
Flourish Week 4

1 In my vision, the man brought me back to the entrance of the Temple. There I saw a stream flowing east from beneath the door of the Temple and passing to the right of the altar on its south side. ... 6 He asked me, "Have you been watching, son of man?" Then he led me back along the riverbank. 7 When I returned, I was surprised by the sight of many trees growing on both sides of the river. ... 12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow along both sides of the river. The leaves of these trees will never turn brown and fall, and there will always be fruit on their branches. There will be a new crop every month, for they are watered by the river flowing from the Temple. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for healing." - Ezekiel 47:1, 6-7, 12 NLT

During our time in this world, we strive to find an environment where we will flourish. But once we arrive in God's kingdom, that environment is evident. In Ezekiel's vision, a stream of water flowed from the Temple feeding the river and nourishing the surrounding trees so that they provided food and healing. The Temple represents the place where God dwells, and it is the presence of God's Spirit that brings nourishment and healing.

We are looking for ways to partner with God to create the best space where His presence can nourish and heal all who seek Him. In what ways would you like to see us welcome and tend those who enter our church campus?

WRAP-UP

As the "non-native" plants in this world we desperately need Jesus's power to save us, set up apart, cultivate us and cause us to flourish. We can't depend on our own resources, but trust in Him so that our roots grow deep and our growth is directed in the right path. We anticipate a Kingdom where this can be fully realized, in the meanwhile, we want to create the best environment for God's work.

MEMORY VERSE

Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. - Colossians 2:7 NLT

Challenge- Continue to pray for God direction and provision during New Life's Flourish Campaign.

INTRODUCTION

Springtime always holds great promise in the garden. The nurseries are stocked with beautiful healthy plants and racks of inviting seed packets just calling to be planted in your yard. Unfortunately, not every seed that falls on the ground will flourish into a beautiful fruit-bearing plant. What is needed for a little seed to become a productive plant? It must be tended. The same is true for our souls- to flourish they must be well tended. Our sermon series is based in the parable of the farmer and this week we consider just what is needed for our souls to flourish under the hand of the Master Gardener.

Ice Breaker

What is growing in your garden right now? How is it doing so far?

Key Passage

20 The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. 21 But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word.

- Matthew 13:20-21 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Non-Natives

As you look around the hillsides you will see dazzling displays of wildflowers. These are the native plants of the Central Coast. Some might call them weeds. They thrive on what is naturally found here – the sandy soils, the mild winters, and a little rain. But if you plant an alpine flower like Edelweiss here, it isn't going to make it because it wasn't designed to live here. In a way, we are like the Edelweiss, because we are citizens of a different kingdom. We were made to

flourish when we are steeped in the presence of God, not in the culture surrounding us.

Peter warns his readers about this when he addresses God's people who have been scattered throughout the world.

"Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul.

1 PETER 2:11 msg

11 Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. - 1 Peter 2:11 NLT

The Message version of this verse paraphrases Peter by saying "don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul" The New Living translates that more closely to Peter's original words saying, "keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your souls."

Most of us want to "fit in". But what are some of the ways we might be tempted to "fit in" that could damage us? What is something that you feel inclined to accept, when you know God is calling you to a different standard? Does accepting it impact your relationship to God?

The prophet Ezra recognized that God's people had adopted the sinful practices of their captors during their exile in Babylon. Even after their return to Jerusalem the damage persisted.

6 I prayed, "O my God, I am utterly ashamed; I blush to lift up my face to you. For our sins are piled higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached to the heavens. 7 From the days of our ancestors until now, we have been steeped in sin. That is why we and our kings and our priests have been at the mercy of the pagan kings of the land. We have been killed, captured, robbed, and disgraced, just as we are today. - Ezra 9:6-7 NLT

7 "But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. 8 They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit. - Jeremiah 17:7-8 NLT

Ezra says the people were "steeped in sin". Consider how your free time was spent over the past week. How often did you choose to immerse yourself in the presence of God and how often did you give in to those "worldly desires" mentioned in 1Peter? Where can you make changes in the coming weeks to spend more time steeping in God's presence and less in the world?

When we choose to remain in God's presence, we can flourish just like the trees described in Jeremiah 17, our roots will grow deep, and we will be fruitful and resilient.

2. Roots and Trellises

Good gardeners know that keeping the plants healthy takes a lot of work. If you neglect to water, let the weeds grow or the pests go unchecked it can be disastrous. The same is true of maintaining a healthy soul. It is more work than you can handle alone. Luckily in this case, God is the gardener, and you are the plant.

16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. - Ephesians 3:16-17 NLT

Paul's letter to the Ephesians helps us gain perspective on our part and God's part in producing a fruitful life. How does Paul describe the resources available to us? If you have been depending on yourself to supply the strength for a healthy soul, you will probably fall short. What is your part to ensure healthy growth? Are there areas you feel you need to trust God with that you haven't fully surrendered? This would be a good time to pause and pray that God would strengthen you to trust Him more in those areas.

Another tool in a successful garden is a trellis. The plant needs something to stabilize it and direct its growth along the right path. A trellis gives the scaffolding that helps a plant to grow. Our "trellises" are the rhythms and practices we adopt that keep us firmly planted in God's word and growing in our faith. These are referred to as a "rule of life". What are your regular practices that keep you supported in your faith? Is there something more you sense you need to incorporate; prayer, study, worship, fasting, fellowship...?