

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. Today we are kicking off a new series, called *The Art of Thriving*.
- B. Speaking of thriving, I have to say a huge thank you to the hundreds of volunteers who made our Easter Services possible. We had the largest attendance ever on this campus... but the most awesome thing of all is 180 people saved. One hundred eighty lives transformed, and families impacted by the power of Jesus and his gospel.
- C. There are too many people to thank, but I have to give special shout outs to Tim Hawkins for the most amazing music, and worship (and moves). And to Margi Giovannetti for the beautiful, creative, artistic sets both here and in the lobby, and a few touches in the Ministry Center auditorium too.
- D. So let's look at our key verse for this series from the first Psalm.
 - 1. *He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalms 1:3, NKJV).*
- E. This verse meant a lot to me when I was in high school. I was confused about my life, my direction, my worth. People were asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up, and I didn't know. I felt insecure about future. I felt insecure about myself.
- F. What if I made the wrong choice? Took the wrong turn? It felt like all my decisions were so important, if I made one wrong choice it would wreck me forever.
- G. That's when this Bible verse really started making sense to me.
 - 1. Outward factors mattered: where I went to school, who I dated, who I married, what job I took, what city I lived in. All those choices mattered. And we will talk about them.
 - 2. But something else mattered way more: and that is my inner life with God.
- H. This verse is a promise from God. A bankable promise from God. You can bank your life on it.
- I. The promise is the end of the verse: whatever he does shall prosper.
- J. This is the Bible's wisdom on the Art of Thriving. Prospering. Finding yourself. Landing. Being at peace with yourself, with God, and with your world.
- K. Please don't take this as simply a way to get rich. It's not. The prosperity here is a treasure money can't buy. This was originally written in Hebrew, so I looked up the word. It has the idea of being led along a good way, a life-giving path.
- L. This is where the Art of Thriving begins. This is the foundation. Get this one wrong, and nothing else will work quite right.
- M. If you want to thrive on the inside, no matter what is happening on the outside, then stay on the path. That's the big idea.
- N. That's what took hold of me back when I was young. I can stand here and tell you today that God keeps his Word.
- O. At Neighborhood, we call this path The Grace Pathway, and that is what I want to talk to you about today.

II. *The Art of Thriving – the Grace Pathway*

- A. *God Saves You.*
 - 1. *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12, NKJV).*
 - 2. As I mentioned, last weekend, we saw over 180 people do this thing called being saved. I know the language is weird. The whole thing is weird for anybody who didn't grow up a church person.
 - 3. There are different words for being saved in the Bible. Born again. Regenerated. Coming to God. Calling on God. Believing in Jesus. New birth. Becoming a Christian. Becoming a disciple or follower of Christ.
 - 4. These all mean the same thing. It's really very easy:
 - a) I once was lost, but now am found / Was blind, but now I see.
 - 5. There's a before/after picture in every Christian's life.
 - 6. Before you receive Christ, and after you receive Christ.
 - 7. It's a clear dividing line. There's nobody who's sort of saved, or partially saved, or halfway saved.
 - 8. Either your born, or your not born. Spiritually alive or spiritually dead. No in-between.
 - 9. The biggest, baddest thing that has happened in the last 50 years in America is that churches stopped emphasizing being saved. This has been a disaster. Pastors stopped giving invitations, because they figured everybody was already saved. So wrong.
 - 10. The first time I gave an invitation to be saved here at Neighborhood blew my mind. I explained about Jesus, his cross, and his salvation. I said a little about receiving him by faith. I told people to bow their heads. I led them line by line in a prayer of salvation, just like I normally do.
 - 11. Then I asked them to look up at me if they just prayed that prayer.
 - 12. So many people looked up at me, I thought there was something wrong. These are church people! They had to be saved already, right? I thought they misunderstood me.
 - 13. So I said, "Wait a minute. Everybody please close your eyes and bow your heads again. I want to be really, really clear. Don't look at me if you were saved some time ago, or if you've ever prayed to receive Jesus before ever. Just look at me if this is your very first time ever, okay? One, two, three, look at me."
 - 14. Bam! All the same heads looked up at me.
 - 15. And I thought, Score! I just came to a church full of unsaved people!
 - 16. Church leaders from the past, like Francis Schaeffer and J. Vernon McGee used to say 20-50% of church people are not even saved.
 - 17. So, if you're in that group. We love you. We are not preaching a gospel of moral improvement. We are preaching a gospel of a Savior named Jesus who died and rose again that he might offer you the totally free gift of forgiveness, eternal life, and life with God starting today. Believe, and be born again.
 - 18. *There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*
 - 19. There are plenty of other names that can change your behavior. Tony Robbins. Oprah. Tim Ferriss. Different religions. A therapist. A counselor. A Twelve Step Group. Weight Watchers.

20. But there's only one name that saves.
21. The New testament tells the story of 3000 people saved on one day, 5,000 on another day. There was no way they did behavioral analysis on these people.
 - a) Hey, have you kicked your addiction yet?
 - b) Have you gotten over that hatred yet?
 - c) Or that pride?
22. No. It wasn't about behavior or religious ritual or life change or anything.
23. It was about simply saying, "I now believe in Jesus. He is my Savior. He died for me. He rose again for me. I don't know how it all works, but he is my Savior and I believe in him."
24. We must be saved. That's where it starts.
25. This is instantaneous, momentary, it happens in one nano-second, the moment you first believe.
 - a) It's a total transformation of who you are, but not yet of how you act.
 - (1) New person.
 - (2) New identity.
 - (3) New nature.
 - (4) New destiny.
 - (5) New powers.
 - (6) New name.
 - (a) Being saved is actually the biggest deal of a person's life. It's bigger than anything else.
 - i) Why is that?
 - ii) Because God looks at you in a whole new way. It's a really big deal.
 - iii) Once you can look at yourself in the same way, you will finally have the power to become the person you prayed you could become.
 - (1) Salvation is the set up for behavior change, but salvation alone doesn't really change behavior, especially at first.
26. The Art of Thriving starts here: God Saves You. It's non negotiable. It's essential. It's step one, and there is no other step one.
27. God saves you. And it takes. And it sticks forever.

B. God Blesses You

1. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (Ephesians 1:3, NKJV)*
2. No one can thrive without step two, God blesses you.
3. It is the missing link in 90% of churches today. It is forgotten, neglected, and omitted way too much.
4. And yet, it after salvation, is the single most life-changing truth-set that can be communicated.
5. Our icon is blue for blesses, and it shows God's hand reaching down to fill your hand.
6. To bless somebody is to give them good things for free. To give gifts to them and bestow benefits upon them.
7. If you prayed through step one last week, then Step Two already happened. God blessed you.
8. Our verse says so... he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It's a done deal. A past tense blessing.
9. Something happened so remarkable that when you tap into it, it will truly blow your mind. By that, I mean, it will blow up the lies that hold you back, peel off the labels that break your heart, and break the chains of legalism that imprison your spirit.
10. What am I talking about?
11. Let me illustrate with a Bible story.
12. Early in the Bible, God's people were trapped in slavery in Egypt, just like people today are trapped in slavery to their fallen natures and to sin.
13. God sent a deliverer named Moses to set them free, just like he later sent the ultimate deliverer named Jesus. Moses set them free by parting the Sea, and the slaves stepped into their freedom. This is a great picture of salvation.
14. Within one year, God's people had made it across the wilderness to the border of the Promised Land. This is where their best life awaited them. It was a place of fertile farmlands. Of beautiful cities. Of prosperity and peace.
15. In other words, the Promised Land is where the Art of Thriving would kick into high gear.
16. God has a promised land for you, too. Not a geographical promised land, but a spiritual one, an emotional one, and a psychological one. This is a place in your life where you experience maximum blessing from God, and God receives maximum glory from you. It is you, thriving.
17. When the Jews reached the promised land, God told them this:
 - a) *"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. (Joshua 1:3)*
18. There's a future tense... will tread upon.
19. There's a past tense... I have given you.
20. God said, I have given you all these things. Past tense. Done deal. All these blessings. All these riches. All these privileges. All these treasures. All these powers. Rights. Authorities. Names.
21. All these blessings are already yours. You don't have to pay for them, earn them, or make them happen. You just have to go get them. Believe they're yours, and act like it.
22. Possess your possessions.
23. On the day you were saved, God deposited a huge treasure into your account. Your name is on it. These treasures are yours. God blessed you, once for all.
24. It's your inheritance, go spend it.
 - a) He has blessed you with SECURITY... once you're saved, you're always saved.

- b) He has blessed you with a new IDENTITY... all those horrible labels that life has stuck on you — stupid, failure, ugly, worthless, unwanted... God peeled them off, and he's put new labels on you... and he calls you Beautiful, Capable, Powerful, and Good. Learn that stuff. It's all in the Bible.
- c) He has blessed you with PRIVILEGES like Bible study and prayer.
- 25. When a person starts to realize how blessed they are, it changes their psychology. It heals your deficit thinking. It restores how you value yourself.
- 26. People act out of who they think they are.
- 27. The greatest treasure God has given you is the blessing of your truest, deepest self set free from a lifetime of craziness.
- 28. We combine all these into one awesome class called Identity in Christ. This your step two.
- 29. I said it's the missing link because most places skip God Saves you and jump right to God Grows you (step 3). But that's a mistake. It's step 2 that changes your operating system. It installs Grace as the new psychological, emotional, spiritual, relational operating system in your soul.
- 30. That's when you're ready for step 3.
- C. *God Grows You*
 - 1. *"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32, NKJV).*
 - 2. If you want to thrive as a person, you have to stick growth deep inside your mind. A growth mindset.
 - a) Our icon for this is an arrow that starts with God's power, coming down through you, and then back up to God. Even your growth is the power and grace of God.
 - 3. Grow up with God.
 - 4. The main, most important, non-negotiable, absolutely essential way to grow with God is the BIBLE.
 - 5. Raise your hand if you know how to drive a car?
 - 6. So, you can drive.
 - 7. When you drive, how hard are you thinking about driving? Hold the wheel like this. Move your foot to this pedal, and then to that pedal. Push. Turn on the blinkers. Speed up. Slow down.
 - 8. Do you consciously think about all that stuff when you drive?
 - 9. No.
 - 10. It's second nature. You drive without thinking. At least on the surface. You're still thinking, but it's on a much deeper level.
 - 11. You've been driving for so long, you just drive without driving. It's second nature. It's integrated into your personality.
 - 12. You've probably forgotten how complex driving really is. If you have taught your teenager how to drive, you know what I'm talking about. There's a lot of stuff to learn.
 - 13. It works with most stuff that way.
 - 14. If you play baseball, it's the same thing. You don't have to tell yourself to run to first base. You don't have to tell yourself to drop the bat on your way. I took a British guy to a baseball game, and we had a great time, but he didn't have a clue what was going on. I absorbed the sport through years of playing ball.
 - 15. It works that way with baking, computer coding, science, mathematics, parenting. Everything.
 - 16. It works that way with the Bible too.
 - 17. You learn to stand, then to walk, then to run.
 - 18. If you stay in the Bible, it becomes second nature. God's promises. God's character. God's ways.
 - a) You quickly discern what's right and what's wrong.
 - b) You can tell between foolish choices and wise choices.
 - c) You can see the devil's lies a mile away.
 - (1) Not because you've taken a crash course in the Bible, but because you've dripped it into your being over and over and over, day after day for years.
 - (a) *At a time when you should be teaching others, you need teachers yourselves to repeat to you the ABC of God's revelation to men. You have become people who need a milk diet and cannot face solid food! "Solid food" is only for the adult, that is, for the man who has developed by experience his power to discriminate between what is good and what is evil. (Hebrews 5:12, 14, Phil)*
 - 19. Grow up from milk to solid food. That's the idea.
 - 20. There's only one way to grow up: You stumble through the hard stuff. When you first start with the Bible, it's like your first tee shot. You feel like an idiot who doesn't know anything and everybody's watching you.
 - 21. But the more you do it — if you stick with the Bible, the Bible's deep truths stick with you.
 - 22. What's in the Bible? Wisdom.
 - 23. God's wisdom on every single part of your life that matters.
 - a) WISDOM, God's wisdom, is the heart and soul of the Art of Thriving.
 - 24. Wisdom is thinking without thinking. It's becoming a spiritual Yoda. A counselor, a parent, a friend who sees the world the way God sees it. And you see it really fast.
 - 25. The Bible is the main thing.
 - a) Bible stories. Bible doctrines. Bible theology. Bible words. Deep stuff. Real stuff. The whole Bible for the whole Christian.
 - 26. Every major survey shows that most Christians are pretty illiterate about the Bible. Not at Neighborhood, of course!
 - 27. You open the hood, and look at your engine. It's a bunch of parts. They all connect with each other. They all work together.
 - 28. So it is with the Bible. A bunch of parts. Be patient with yourself. But not so patient that you never grow.
 - a) Step One: God Saves You — that happens in an instant.
 - b) Step Two: God Blesses you — that happens in an instant also.
 - c) But Step Three: God Grows You — that's for the rest of your life.

29. And we want to be partners with you:
30. We have forty groups that will help you learn the Bible. We have classes, weekend seminars, groups, and events. We have GrowU, which is a weekend conference coming May 12 & 13.
 - a) If you received Jesus as your Savior over Easter, we want you to be our guest at GrowU — we want to get you started. Contact Dinah - dvaughn@neighborhood.cc.
 - (1) The Bible is the Mind of Christ, and you can't live like Christ unless you think like Christ.
 - (a) Small Groups & Classes
 - (b) GrowU
 - (c) Bible Reading & Study
 - (d) Prayer
 - (e) Lifestyle Adjustments
 - (f) Personal Growth

31. Step Four is also a lifetime thing.

D. God Uses You

1. *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16)
2. One of the most important things a person can have is a sense of purpose.
3. It doesn't really help if your purpose is all self-absorbed. My purpose is to get rich and run the world. Or even if it's just about you and your family.
4. You need a cause that makes you dig deep and give of your best to a worthy cause. For every child of God, that cause will always be the same: helping people find and follow God.
5. Somebody helped guide you down the Grace Pathway, now it's your turn to help guide others. This is true thriving God's way. You might not be healthy. You might not be rich. You might be single or divorced or widowed or married. You may have kids or not have kids.
6. But if you are letting God use your life, you are a champion in the halls of heaven. The angels salute you and the demons fear you, and God not only loves you, he approves of your way of life too.
 - a) You don't just grow just to grow.
 - b) You grow to become a mighty weapon in the hands of God.
7. Good Works done God's way have to be done by God's power.
 - a) Human power can only make rotten fruit. (dead works)
 - b) Divine power = works that last.
8. This is where you discover your spiritual gifts and superpowers.
9. This is where you volunteer for stuff.
10. This is where God uses you through prayer, and through giving, and through a generous spirit in the world.
11. This is where you begin to tell other people the gospel - the good news of Jesus.
 - a) Not out of guilt.
 - b) Not out of duty or shame.
 - c) But out of love for a Savior who loved you first and loved you best.
12. Once a person is saved, and knows they are blessed and grows up a little bit, then God wants to use you in mighty ways.
13. For what?
14. To help other people find the treasure you found when you found Christ.

III. Conclusion

- A. God saves you.
- B. God blesses you.
- C. God grows you.
- D. God uses you.
- E. There's the pattern. It never changes. It's as ancient as the Word of God.
- F. My hope and my prayer for you is that you would thrive. And each week in this series, we're going to unlock the pattern how God makes that happen.