

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. A special welcome to all our students in high school and junior high, joining us for Worship Together Weekend. We love you and are honored you're part of our church.
- B. Our topic is *The Art of Thriving*.
- C. My talk today is part two.
- D. We're talking about living the life you were meant to live. Being the person you were meant to be. Your real self. Your truest, deepest, most authentic self.
- E. Thriving means rising above your worries and fears. It means you've landed in a place where you believe in yourself, your God, and your possibilities for the future. To thrive is to receive love and to give love and to do that in ways that make you feel honored and the people around you feel blessed. To thrive is to set your life on God's reality and to follow his truth.
- F. There's great picture of thriving in the Bible.
 - 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. (Psalm 1:3)*
- G. God is not promising that you'll have lots of money. But he is promising that you'll be rich in things that money can't buy.
- H. In love. In joy. In peace. In purpose. Rich in relationships. Rich in deep inner satisfaction.
- I. It's an inner prosperity. And it's a promise from God.
- J. It's a bankable promise from God.
- K. I don't care how old you are or how young you are. God promised that if you set your life in a certain place, whatever you do will prosper.
- L. Whatever college you go to. Whatever degree you major in. Whatever person you marry. Whatever city you live in.
- M. If you set your life in a certain place, whatever you do will prosper.
- N. This is the Art of Thriving.
- O. So what is that certain place where you have to set your life? There are a few pieces to put together to understand it. If you want to put your life in a place where God's prosperity thrives inside you, here's the first thing to do. We're backing up just one verse from our starting place.
 - 1. *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2)*
- P. I'd like you to think with me today on the topic: *Feeding Hope*.

II. Feeding Hope

- A. *What is Hope?*
 - 1. *Hope is confidence in your future.*
 - 2. This is not easy.
 - a) Hope is confidence that a bad family doesn't doom you to a bad life.
 - b) Hope believes that your failures don't define you, and your mistakes don't own you.
 - c) Hope says weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.
 - d) Hope lets you imagine a future that can actually come true.
 - e) Hope releases worry to a Father in heaven who adores you.
 - f) Hope promises other people's labels won't stick forever.
 - g) Hope knows that your future is not limited by your DNA, GPA, ACT, or SAT.
 - h) Hope is assurance that you own your future, your future doesn't own you.
 - i) It believes in your potential.
 - j) Rests in your capabilities.
 - k) Celebrates your opportunities.
 - l) Guarantees your prosperity.
 - m) Reaches for your dreams.
 - n) And trusts in your God.
 - (1) Hope tells you God can use your story, no matter how bleak, hard, painful, or dysfunctional — he can use your story to write a new future for your tomorrows that brings life and love to this bleak, old world.
 - 3. Hope is a confidence in your future so strong you can get up every morning and rise above the challenges you face today, because you believe it will all be worth it tomorrow.
 - a) Yes, we'll always have doubts.
 - b) We'll always have fears.
 - 4. Nobody's perfect in this. We always have times when we give in to worry and despair.
 - 5. Pretty much every week, I've had to talk myself into pastoring for another week, and preaching just one more sermon. Because hope is fragile, sometimes.
 - 6. Nobody's positive all the time, unless they're faking it!
 - 7. But most of the time, you can have hope. Maybe you've come today pretty desperate. Everything's messed up. Your future scares you. Maybe it depresses you.
 - 8. We've all been there. We all feel for you.
 - 9. Do you know that God says he has a special place in his heart for the broken hearted?
 - a) He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)
 - 10. So you say, "how do I have hope? Where does it come from? How can I wave my magic wand and quit fearing my future?"
 - 11. We'll get to that, but first...
- B. *What kills hope?*
 - 1. *What kills your hope are all the messages that make you a shrimp and your future problems giants.*
 - 2. This is super hard to get away from.

3. Constant messages: you're not good enough, the world is hard, doom and gloom, bad economy and bad politicians, scary future, you're dumb and you're a failure.
4. All that stuff adds up.
5. Let's back up one more verse:
 - a) *Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; (Psalm 1:1)*
6. Every single day you swim in a sea of crazy.
7. I went deep sea fishing once. I was nine years old, and I never went back. I never will.
8. That's because we went up and down, side to side, forward and backward, up and down, side to side, forward and backward...
9. Of our group of six, my Dad and I were the last men standing.
10. The other four had already heaved their guts into the cruel sea. Then they scurried like little cowards to the bunks below decks.
11. I, however, kept my lunch down and braved the waves topside with my dad for a three-hour tour. A dozen other passengers had also dropped like flies. Only a handful of hardy souls remained to probe the choppy Gulf of Mexico for big fish.
12. I never did get my hand on a fishing pole.
13. About thirty minutes in, an iron fist gripped my stomach and squeezed harder with each wave of the sea. The ship's captain promised calmer waters ahead, and chugged toward it. I prayed a passionate boyhood prayer: "Dear God, maker of heaven and earth, please, please, don't let me puke."
14. A queasy feeling stretched from my throat to belly. Even my cheeks felt funny. My nose involuntarily scrunched itself at the stench of decayed fish mingled with everybody's vomit.
15. I sat next to my dad on a bench. He smiled, smoked a pipe, and enjoyed the sunny day.
16. "Dad, don't you feel funny inside?" My nine-year old voice quavered a bit.
17. "No, son. I got used to it in the military."
18. "Oh..."
19. About that time, a sadistic deck hand brought out the bait.
20. Trays of chopped, raw squid.
21. That did it for me. I now understand the purpose of the handrail that runs around the edge of a ship. The deck hand laughed at me. He'd grown accustomed to the motion of the sea.
22. The next two hours saw me going back and forth between writhing in agony on a bunk beside my brother and friends, and puking into the warm Gulf waters.
23. The up and down and side to side.
24. To make it even worse, when the trip to purgatory was over... when at long last we stepped onto beautiful Mother Earth, the ground beneath my feet kept moving. It went back and forth and side to side and up and down and forward and back. It took a full hour to get over that.
25. What mattered was that I was ashore. Hallelujah. I felt like kissing the ground.
26. Listen, God has given us his truth. It's the Bible. It's bedrock. It's bankable truth.
27. Modern society doesn't like God's truth, so they throw it out.
 - a) The counsel of the ungodly — beliefs and philosophies that ignore God's truth.
 - b) The path of sinners — actions, lifestyles, morals, and sexual behaviors that actively go against God's truth.
 - c) The seat of the scornful — a total worldview that makes fun of Christians, of Christ, and of the Bible. I was watching a TV show yesterday when a character had a Bible in his hands, and after a minute, he threw it away over his shoulder and onto the ground. I was done. I'm not watching that program again.
28. Here's God's truth:
29. *What is truth?*
 - a) *Truth is reality.*
 - b) *Truth is reality as God experiences it, God defines it, and God teaches it to us.*
 - c) All truth is God's truth.
 - d) But our society doesn't even believe in truth, except to say there is no truth.
 - (1) So everybody's out at sea, and there is absolutely nothing solid, nothing certain, and nothing to believe in.
 - (2) This uncertainty, is the new normal.
 - (3) And every day you're stuck in it.
30. Modern society has lived so long on uncertainty and skepticism we've become used to it. Like the ship's deckhand, the instability feels normal to us.
 - a) Like weightlessness feels normal to an astronaut.
 - b) But astronauts were not designed for weightlessness.
31. And we were not designed for truthlessness.
32. Because nobody was designed for a truth that won't stay true.
33. Or a God who won't stay God.
34. This is why I say you swim in a sea of craziness. Because the world around you — and I'm not saying they're horrible people — I'm saying they're horribly confused.
35. The world around you has kicked God's truth away.
36. So what goes in its place?
37. The devil's lies.
 - a) *Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons. (1 Timothy 4:1, NLT)*

38. It's pretty serious. The main philosophies that run our society has been influenced by the devil (1 John 5:19) - infected with a painful plague
39. That plague:
 - a) Devalues precious human life.
 - b) Suffocates human freedom.
 - c) Confuses love with eroticism.
 - d) Makes a god out of money, fame, and success.
 - e) Breaks hearts.
 - f) Offers no hope.

(1) *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. (1 John 5:19))*
40. If you pattern your life according to the counsel of people who make no room for the true God... (Thinking)
 - a) Or if you position your life on the same path as people who disrespect God's path... (Behaving)
 - (1) Or if you settle your emotions, psychology, and beliefs into a place of sarcasm, cynicism, and skepticism about things that matter most... (Belonging)
 - (a) Then, you will suck every drop of hope out of your soul.
 - (b) No true joy.
 - (c) Not real happiness.
 - (d) No authentic confidence in your future.
 - i) You've got to say, I love you, but I don't accept your sorry, counterfeit truth.
 - ii) And your wimpy, counterfeit god is nothing to write home about either.
41. Hope is confidence in future good that comes from the hand of the true and living God. But the world around you has killed God in their broken imaginations.
 - a) If God doesn't control the future, who does?
 - (1) The strongest, wealthiest, bossiest people do.
 - (2) It's survival of the fittest.
 - (3) OR it's become dependency on the fittest. Just make yourself a compliant little worker bee with no identity of your own, and make sure somebody else takes care of you, and you live by the sweat and labor of others.
42. Erase God, and you erase truth. Erase truth, and you put us all on a very shaky sea where nothing is solid and everything is up for grabs.
 - a) It's the Lord of the Flies.
43. What I'm saying is there is a constant external pressure on your brain and your emotions to kill your hope.
44. This is the Art of Thriving, and the world around us can only offer a dim substitute of the real thing.
45. So where does hope come from?
- C. *Where does hope come from?*
 1. First the Scripture:
 - a) *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2)*
 2. Let's break it down.
 3. This is the secret to happiness. See the word "delight"? That means true joy. Deep satisfaction. Contentment and happiness.
 4. It's the one thing everybody's after.
 5. Look at it this way. For the rest of your life, you are spending everything you have to find what this one word offers. Why else would you strive so hard? You're trying to make your life happy. You're looking for pleasure, joy, peace, happiness, and all that goes with it.
 6. According to this verse, where is that found?
 7. In the Law of the Lord.
 8. Let's call this the Operating System of the Lord. The deep coding. The source code behind the visible display.
 9. That source code is spelled out letter by letter and word by word. It's called the Bible. This whole book is the Law of the Lord – not law, like a speed limit.
 10. But law like the law of gravity. The ultimate truth. The deepest reality. Like it or not, agree with it or not, the Law of the Lord always wins.
 11. You can't break God's law, you can only break yourself against God's law.
 12. Picture it as two competing philosophies:
 - a) The World System vs. God's Truth.
 - b) The red pill or the blue pill.
 - c) Unreality or reality.
 13. You have to pick.
 14. Actually not exactly. You have already picked. That's the scary part. Because the World System, heartbreaking as it is, is really subtle. It doesn't come up to you, stick out its hand and say, "Hi, I'm a big fat lie, and I'm going to break your heart if you go my ways. Come on, let's have a good time."
 15. No, it comes to you and says, I can make you feel good, and I can make you nice to other people, and it's very seductive.
 16. You have already picked. My bet is that some of what you have picked is the wrong side. You've swallowed some of the lies.
 17. And the result?
 18. Hope fades away. And all you can do is keep pressing on to another day.
 19. The good news is that you can reprogram your mind. You can change your thought patterns. You can over-write the lies, and create deep structures of God's life-giving truths. You can come to see your life from God's perspective.

- a) *Hope comes from deep reprogramming of your heart, mind, and emotions with the truth of God's Word, which is ultimate reality.*
20. When you do that, you will have more hope than you ever thought possible.
21. How?
22. How do you reprogram your soul for hope?
23. That's where the rest of this verse comes in.
24. His delight is in the Law of the Lord — the source code.
25. And in his law he meditates day and night.
26. What is that?
27. Consider the cow.
28. Do you know that a cow has basically four stomachs?
- a) Each hour a cow can take 890 bites of grass. This food enters stomach number one, called a run. There are millions of little bugs that slosh around with the food in — ready for this — 25 gallons of liquids and acids.
- b) It's all turned into a nice green smoothie.
- c) The the cow pukes it up again, with all kinds of added flavor, and chews it all over again.
- d) Then it's swallowed again into stomach number two, puked up, swallowed into stomach number three, puked up, chewed, swallowed into the final stomach and then out.
- e) This is called chewing the cud.
- f) A cow can spend eight hours a day chewing the cud. The whole process is called rumination.
29. You're welcome.
30. For centuries, Christian leaders have used rumination as a picture of Bible meditation.
31. Because this is the only way to reprogram your soul.
32. The only way to thrive is to have hope.
33. The only way to have real hope is to have hope based on who God is, and what God has promised to do for you.
34. The only way to have that hope is to reprogram your soul, by speaking God's Word into yourself, bite by bite, and then going over and over again until the whole thing starts to get installed.
35. Christian meditation is not looking within.
36. It is not quieting yourself to listen to God's voice.
37. It is not not launching a voyage into inner space.
38. Christian mediation is to take the words of the Bible and go over and over them for a while until they start to sink in.
39. Let me give you three quick pointers on this.
- a) Read your Bible... even if it's just a little bit... every day. Use a Bible app.
- b) Think about its exact words in super-slow-mo. One word at a time. Let it go deep.
- c) Say it out loud, thoughtfully. (The word for meditate means to murmur.)
- d) Put yourself in the verse.
- e) Don't ever quit.

III. Conclusion

- A. Here's what will happen inside you:
- B. *First, your picture of God will change.*
1. He will grow bigger than the scary giants on the horizons of your life. You will grow confident in his love for you. You will grow confident in the power of your salvation.
- C. *Second, your picture of yourself will change.*
1. You will feel stronger. You will feel more capable to handle the future. Your confidence will grow.
2. It won't be confidence anchored in silly little sayings.
3. It will be anchored in the almighty promises of your all-powerful God.
- D. *Third, your picture of your future will change.*
1. You will see your future in the hands of God, through God in the hands of you.
- a) You will see a day when the people who hurt you have no power over you.
- b) The mistakes you have made will not define you.
- c) The consequences you must deal with will not defeat you.
- d) The questions you must answer will not confuse you.
- e) And that is HOPE!
2. You will know that with God, you can handle everything that happens to you, even if it's really, really hard.
- E. Every day, I get up, and I read my Bible, and I think about it in super slow motion.
- F. And even when life is hard, I have hope.
- G. That's my prayer for you.