

House On The Rock Life Group Study outline 2023

September: Thriving against all odds

Outlines for the month

Week 1: From surviving to thriving ✓

Week 2: Thriving God's way

Week 3: Turning adversity into opportunity

Introduction

It is easy to get overwhelmed in this fast-paced world we live in. The challenges we face can seem insurmountable. Whether it is trying to stretch our paycheck to buy groceries and gasoline or that bad luck seems to be at every turn, it can feel like we are surrounded by mountains and there is no way out, but there is.

It is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day things of life. We start to lose sight of the big picture and God's plan for our lives. The world starts to surround us and make us feel trapped. Real or imagined, it is a scary perspective to have. It is so easy to drop into survival mode and stop thriving.

When we are in survival mode, we get tunnel vision for whatever is right in front of us. We lose sight of the big picture. It is so natural to drop into survival mode. But that's the thing; if you are just surviving you are not thriving.

When we are in the wilderness of life it is only natural to move into survival mode (after all, nothing else matters if you don't survive). God appreciates the challenges that we deal with, and yet his desire for us is that we go beyond surviving to thriving.

How can we break out of survival mode and get on the path towards thriving?

Intro credit: Celllifechurch.org

Pilot text

Deu 29:5 And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet.

Deu 2:2-4a "And the LORD spoke to me, saying: 'You have skirted this mountain long enough; turn northward. And command the people, saying, "You are about to pass through..."

- Our two pilot texts show us contrasting pictures of being in survival mode and on the path towards thriving (Deu 2:2-4a).
- 1. **Survival mode** (Deu 29:5) **focuses on:**
 - Managing the 'bad'. Finding a way to live with the consequences of your mistakes without giving up. For the children of Israel we know that 40 years was not God's

original plan but the result of mistakes made during the journey. Sometimes we make mistakes (or we don't but things go wrong all the same), and become 'trapped' in a vicious spiral, and we move into survival mode just so we can ride out the storm.

- Sustaining the good. Keeping the things that are working the same - in this situation no change is good. 'Why fix it if it's not broken?' Sandals, and clothes worn for 40 years are good. Why change them if they still work?
- Holding on. When you have lost so much (as often happens in the wilderness) you default to a loss-minimising mode. You hold on to everything – even past pain (and old clothes that you have since outgrown after 40 years) – because you believe that is all you have.

2. The path towards thriving (Deu 2:2-4a) focuses on:

- Leaving the 'bad' behind. A tree made for the riverside cannot thrive in the wilderness. The person who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by the water (Jer 17:7-8), and therefore key to thriving is to move out of the wilderness. In the example of the Israelites, 40 years was long enough for them to move on. In your own situation, it is probably time for you to move forward too.
- Turning northward, beyond the good to the great. While in the wilderness it's a great testimony that your shoes haven't worn out, and your clothes are still wearable. However, when you turn towards the north you will see that there are better options, such as being able to wear new clothes.
- Passing through. To thrive, we must embrace the process of passing through. Holding on is good if we're only trying to survive; but without passing through there's no getting to the promise.
- Questions for discussion (use scriptures to support your position):
 1. Does forgiveness through the cross mean that we have no responsibility to right past wrongs? Why/why not?
 2. You have a friend that frequently talks about his bad experiences from over 20 years ago so vividly that it all seems very recent. He very rarely talks about recent positive experiences. What would you say to him if you had an opportunity to offer (welcome) advice?

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Nobody enjoys being in the wilderness. Each of us wants to thrive in life. But if we want true success, it's crucial to work out a biblical definition of the term. Otherwise, we may be like the person who climbed the ladder of success only to find that it was leaning against the wrong wall. We may waste time pursuing the wrong goals and making wrong decisions. If our target is wrong, we will fail even if we hit it.

Popular culture defines success primarily in financial terms, throwing in, perhaps, the ideas of power, fame, and the elusive quality, "happiness." As Christians, we can easily see the fallacy in defining success in those terms, and yet often we are influenced by our culture more than we care to admit. Christians reveal their skewed definition of success when they rush out to buy the latest story of some celebrity who has made a profession of faith, or when they parade famous athletes before the church as if they were spiritual authorities.

So, how can we ensure that we are succeeding and thriving according to God's will?

Intro credit: bible.org

Pilot text

Deu 2: 4-5, 7, 9, 19 4 And command the people, saying, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. 5 Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.

7 "For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing." '

9 Then the Lord said to me, 'Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.' "

19 And when you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot as a possession.' "

- What principles do we see from the pilot texts about thriving God's way?
 - **Stay in your lane (4-5).** God will not give you that which he has given to someone else as their (specific) inheritance
 - **Don't be idle but [positively] productive (7).** "For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand". For this blessing to manifest, you have to actually do something. Reframe your present and future experience against the backdrop of the blessing. Why are you not doing [whatever that thing is that you know you should be doing], when the Lord has already blessed the work of your hand?
 - **Embrace the passing through (4, 9,19).** God will not be rushed. There will be many 'passings through' before you get to your destination. Embrace the journey and don't be distracted.
- Questions for discussion (use scriptures to support your position):
 1. Are there circumstances when it is ok to desire something that belongs to another person? Yes/No with reasons.
 2. "He is not only idle who does nothing, but he is idle who might be better employed." Agree/disagree with reasons.

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I recently watched snippets of a mixed martial arts contest. Two champions were battling against each other, very little separating the two. Apparently this was not their first time going up against each other. In fact one of them had a psychological advantage, as he had beaten the other previously. He had the blueprint to win. I'll call him "Blue", and the other one "Red".

The battle went back and forth between the two gladiators. And then the tide swung firmly in favour of Blue. Red was backed up against the wall, fending off one unrelenting attack after another as Blue pressed in to end the fight. Left, right, signature drop of the right shoulder to unleash the winning move... 1, 2 3.

The fight was over in an astonishing matter of seconds.

Blue was on the ground, knocked out by Red. How did this happen?

Red had studied Blue's fighting technique and was prepared for the onslaught. While he was on the backfoot, in serious adversity, he was also biding his time. As Blue's right shoulder dropped, Red saw his opportunity and took it. The rest, as they say, is history.

We all experience times of adversity. But it's how we respond to those times that shape our character, and ultimately our destiny. We can blame, complain, and retreat—or we can turn adversity into opportunity, as Red did.

Pilot text

Deu 2:26-27, 30-33 26 “And I sent messengers from the Wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying, 27 ‘Let me pass through your land; I will keep strictly to the road, and I will turn neither to the right nor to the left.

30 “But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass through, for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand, as it is this day. 31 “And the Lord said to me, ‘See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to possess it, that you may inherit his land.’ 32 Then Sihon and all his people came out against us to fight at Jahaz. 33 And the Lord our God delivered him over to us; so we defeated him, his sons, and all his people.

- What can we learn from the pilot text about turning adversity into opportunity?
 - a. **Maintain your character (26-27).** Moses sent words of peace to Sihon, as he did with all the other kings through whose territories they previously passed. If this adversity is going to turn into an opportunity, we should let God take the lead, and not engineer or manipulate the situation. Don't let the situation dictate who you are, but let your godly character shine through regardless of the circumstance.
 - b. **Look for the opening (30-31).** Pay close attention to what God is saying in the moment. That should be your indication that it's time to change approach. The opposition you're experiencing on your way through could very well be an opportunity for you to step into a space that is about to emerge.
 - c. **Be prepared to seize the moment.** Have you considered the alternative scenario? How was Israel going to respond when they (eventually) got to a king that wouldn't let them through. This was a matter of 'when', not 'if'. Israel was prepared to seize the moment. Are you?
- Questions for discussion (use scriptures to support your position):
 1. The bible calls us to be peaceful. This means we should never be involved in a physical confrontation no matter the circumstances. Agree/disagree with reasons.
 2. A brother has more years of experience and feels that he is more qualified to lead his department than his boss (at work). He therefore seizes every opportunity to emphasise his boss's failings so as to get ahead. He says he is taking what belongs to him by force, according to Matt 11:12. Do you agree with this brother's actions? Why/why not?