

FREE *TO* **THRIVE**

A 7 DAY DEVOTIONAL

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Many people today experience devastating levels of hurt, loneliness, anxiety, depression, porn use, and other struggles. Yet, our struggles aren't random; they're signals that when answered, can pave our way towards a thriving life. Through biblical truth and brain science, this devotional will bring you real solutions to overcome hurts and struggles, and start to thrive in life with Jesus and others. This devotional is based on our new book, *Free to Thrive*.

DAY 1

A GLOBAL CRISIS

TODAY'S READING:

Many people today experience devastating levels of hurt, loneliness, anxiety, depression, porn use, and other struggles. So many of us can struggle and not know how to get free, let alone live a flourishing life. Yet, our struggles aren't random; they're signals that when answered, can pave our way towards a thriving life.

We know this well. I (Josh) was sexually abused growing up for years, and experienced deep pain from my alcoholic father and dysfunctional family. When I came to Christ, many things got better until my unresolved pain caught up to me. I was angry, exhausted, and struggling to go on. I needed God's healing.

I (Ben) also experienced deep hurt, confusion, and trauma growing up. I experienced bullying, my father's anger, mental health struggles, an addiction to porn, and eventually suicidal thoughts.

Our stories aren't anomalies. After 75+ years of combined ministry experience, we've seen so much brokenness, unhealthy relationships, hurt, and addiction all around the world. The church is in crisis. We need a radical movement of God to heal our brokenness and bring abundant wholeness.

Perhaps you relate to our stories and have wondered how to heal from your pain; how to overcome anxiety or that struggle you continue returning to. Or maybe you've simply wondered how to truly thrive in life and in your relationships with God and others.

This 7 day devotional will help kickstart your journey. In it, we combine our years of research, the latest findings from neuroscience, and biblical principles Jesus has used in our lives and thousands of others to set us free to thrive.

REMEMBER:

Today, may we encourage you to remember that:

Jesus cares about your hurt—"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."
Psalm 147:3 NIV

Jesus has broken the power of sin in your life—"He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed."
1 Peter 2:24 NLT

Jesus came to bring you true life—"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."
John 10:10 ESV

He holds the keys and the power to heal you and set you free. Take some time to sit with Him and tell him about your hurt, anxieties, and struggles. Ask Him to bring healing and breakthrough in your life.

CONSIDER:

1. Where do you need to experience God's freedom in your life?
2. How do you think your life will be different when you are healing from those struggles and walking in freedom?

SCRIPTURE:

PSALM 147:3, 1 PETER 2:24, JOHN 10:10

DAY 2

YOU WERE MADE TO THRIVE

TODAY'S READING:

For years, I (Ben) was stuck in anxiety, overeating, shame, and watching porn. I knew these issues were taking me away from the life of wholeness I desired. I was struggling to survive, let alone thrive.

I believe we all desire to thrive—to flourish, to do well in life, to succeed. Every day we give time to school, work, relationships, our spiritual life, and hobbies all to enjoy life and to flourish. But what truly leads to a thriving life?

According to one of the longest studies ever conducted, Harvard found that “Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period.”*

At the core of thriving is healthy relationships. God created us to experience relationships in three categories:

- With Him—knowing God personally as our loving father.
- With ourselves—having a positive view of ourselves and who God made us.
- With others—loving and serving one another and being fully known and fully loved.

We see this as early as the first chapters of the Bible. In Genesis 1 and 2 God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, in a paradise called Eden. There was no pain or suffering. There was only delight, happiness, trust, and harmony with God and one another.

They had an abundance of everything they needed, from their physical needs, to their emotional, relational and ultimately their spiritual needs. God had set up a place for them to thrive and experience wholeness. Although we live in a broken world, God has wired within us the same needs and desires as the first humans.

You were made to thrive and experience wholeness—the completeness that comes from living into God’s design for your life.

GIVE THANKS:

Give thanks to God today for being your ever-present, loving, and caring Father. Experience His presence and nearness. Let His love wash over you. Thank Him for the ways he has provided for your needs through Himself and other people.

CONSIDER:

1. What might be lacking in your experience or view of God, yourself, and others?
2. What is one step you can take to move towards healthier relationships with God, yourself, and others?

SCRIPTURE:

GENESIS 1:26-31, JOHN 17:3, MATTHEW 22:37-40

*<https://www.inc.com/bill-murphy-jr/harvard-spent-80-years-studying-happiness-we-now-know-1-key-habit-that-makes-people-happier-the-problem-most-people-never-even-try.html>

DAY 3

DESIRES & LONGINGS

TODAY'S READING:

Do you know what drives you to do the things you want to do and even the things you hate? Your God-given desires. What? Yep. God put within humanity desires—or heart longings—that drive everything we do.

Proverbs 4:23 says “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

Our actions, our thinking, our beliefs, the good choices we make, the bad...all of these are driven by our heart longings.

Throughout the bible, there are Seven Longings of the heart that are wired in us that motivate everything we do. We can't explore all of them, but some include our need to be accepted, appreciated, safe, and to have our feelings affirmed.

We were designed for the Garden of Eden, where all of these longings and needs were perfectly met by God, ourselves, and others, and to thrive as a result.

Even in our unhealthy decisions and behaviors, we are attempting to fulfill our God-given longings and desires, just in unhealthy ways.

Identifying these longings and how they play out in your life is the first step to healing.

TALK WITH GOD:

Take some time to talk with God about your deepest longings. Think about practical ways He has recently met your longings for things like acceptance and safety through Himself and others.

CONSIDER:

1. How have you experienced acceptance, appreciation, safety, and the affirmation of your feelings by God and others?
2. How has the fulfillment of those longings made you feel? How has it positively impacted your life or community?
3. In what ways can you move towards finding acceptance and safety through God and others today?

SCRIPTURE:

PROVERBS 4:23, PSALM 145:19, ROMANS 15:7, PSALM 12:5

DAY 4

HURT & UNMET LONGINGS

TODAY'S READING:

Growing up I (Ben) deeply desired:

- Acceptance—to be included, loved, and approved of as I was, no matter what
- Attention—to be known and understood with someone entering my world
- Assurance of safety—to feel safe, protected, and provided for

I longed for these things from my parents, relatives, and friends, but I often didn't experience them. Oftentimes, I couldn't meet the expectations of my dad and experienced his disapproval. I was teased by friends for being a Christian and for being overweight and I constantly witnessed my mom's fear in life.

As humans, our longings go unmet, whether in our past or in the present. We live in a broken world and we all hurt at times. Our pain is real and must be named. Only then can we know the places of our lives in which we need to invite Jesus and others in to help us heal.

Our unmet longings all come in the form of two categories—Attacks and Absences.

Attacks are aggressive actions done to us that cause our longings to go unmet. Attacks include name calling, injustice, insults, manipulation, teasing, being rejected or criticized by friends, or sexual or physical abuse.

Second are absences—a loss or an unfulfilled need. Absences include an emotionally or physically absent parent, being ignored by friends or family, being uninvited, or the death of a loved one.

Both attacks and absences hurt. Sometimes the hurt is temporary. But often these hurts build up leading to deep caverns of unmet longings, causing an insatiable thirst to have these longings fulfilled.

BRING YOUR PAIN TO GOD:

No matter the hurt you've experienced, Jesus understands. He walked among us. He experienced suffering too. He mourns with you (John 11:35). And He desires to bring healing.

Take a moment to bring your pain to God. Rest in His comfort and loving arms.

CONSIDER:

1. Growing up, how did you experience unmet longings for acceptance, appreciation, safety, and the affirmation of your feelings?
2. In what ways have you experienced Attacks and Absences?
3. How have these things negatively impacted your life or community?

SCRIPTURE:

PSALM 56:8, JOHN 11:32-36, ISAIAH 53

DAY 5

THE "WHY" BEHIND YOUR STRUGGLES

TODAY'S READING:

All of us get stuck in unwanted behaviors—any thought, belief, or action you've tried to stop but can't. Loneliness, anxiety, depression, shame, anger, and porn use are common examples.

While growing up as a child of an alcoholic father, I (Josh) developed a tendency to rescue others. Rescuing loved ones seemed to be one of the few ways I could gain the acceptance and love of my family.

I felt valued when I could help my mom with chores around the house, knowing that my dad was often too drunk or too disengaged to help her. I felt like I belonged when I became the man of the house and my mom looked to me for emotional support instead of to my dad. I felt like I had purpose when I could protect my sister and comfort her emotionally.

This rescuing behavior continued into my adult life, leaving me feeling like all of the problems in the world were mine to solve. I had a thriving ministry as my team and I were reaching millions globally. But I was overcommitted, exhausted, and compulsively rescuing others from their problems.

Eventually, I called one of my close friends and the best psychologist I knew, Dr. Henry Cloud. As we began meeting each week in his counseling office, I found understanding and healing. I learned that this unhealthy pattern wasn't random, it was driven by a longing to be loved and accepted. I began to experience God's healing as I learned new ways to find the fulfillment of those needs through Him and others.

Our unwanted behaviors aren't random, they're signals to be answered. They're signals that we have deeper longings we are attempting to fulfill. We see this throughout the entire Bible.

In Genesis 3, after sinning against God, Adam was naked and afraid so he hid.

In 1 Samuel 21-24, David had unmet longings for safety leading to anxiety when Saul was seeking to kill him.

In Job 3, Job had unmet longings after losing his family, health, and wealth that he felt so depressed he wished he had never been born.

SURRENDER:

Maybe you:

- Get anxious when you fear for your safety or worry about your future.
- Watch porn to find pseudo-acceptance or love when you feel rejected or inadequate.
- Perform for the approval of others when you feel unwanted or unknown.

Your unmet longings lead to unwanted behaviors. Even in your unwanted behaviors, you are attempting to fulfill your deepest, God-given longings. Yet, these longings will only result in the thriving life that you were created to experience when fulfilled in healthy ways.

Take a minute and confess to God the ways you have sought fulfillment outside of His design. Experience his forgiveness where needed. Surrender to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to strengthen you.

CONSIDER:

1. What unwanted behaviors do you struggle with?
2. What unmet longings lead you to unwanted behaviors?
3. Think about the greatest unmet longing you currently experience. What is one way you can experience this fulfillment through God and other people today?

SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 3:8-10, PSALM 55:1-8

DAY 6

THE BATTLE OF THE BRAIN

TODAY'S READING:

For years I (Ben) believed my struggles with anger, overeating, and porn use were simply bad decisions I kept making—that I just needed to love Jesus more in order to stop.

I wish I had known how my brain played a role in overcoming these struggles.

Over 580 times the Bible mentions the words “mind”, “think”, and “believe”. Throughout these times there’s a huge emphasis on what to put our mental energy towards.

For example, we’re told to set our minds on things above in Colossians 3:2, and to take every thought captive in 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Why? Our behaviors follow our beliefs—our unmet longings and hurt lead us to believe deep rooted lies. Over time, we can begin operating our lives from these lies. For example, hurt from others can lead us to develop a sense of shame, believing we’re flawed at the core of our being despite having been made new through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We can attempt to hustle for our worth—overworking, getting the “right” body, making more money—to feel approved of and valuable.

Others of us may start to become depressed, turning inward and losing all hope in life. Still, some can turn to overeating, getting drunk, or sexual activity as a way to numb these lies and feel a temporary sense of peace and safety.

These repeated thoughts and behaviors lead to fixed neurological pathways in our brains. Over time, we have a hardwired physical brain issue needing resolution, which explains why it can be so difficult to stop returning to unhealthy beliefs and behaviors.

The good news in Romans 12:2 is you can renew your mind. Neuroplasticity affirms this reality, explaining that your brain can change as new brain pathways are developed and old pathways begin to wither away.

Over time, lies can be replaced with truth, and brokenness can be healed by God, as you take steps to live into the flourishing life Jesus offers you.

CONSIDER:

1. What are your unhealthy patterns of thoughts and behaviors?
2. How does understanding the brain's functionality impact you?
3. What one step can you take to begin changing an unhealthy thought pattern through God's power today?

SCRIPTURE:

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5, COLOSSIANS 3:2, PHILIPPIANS 4:8, ROMANS 12:2

DAY 7

BE FREE TO THRIVE TODAY

TODAY'S READING:

In this devotional, we've explored the thriving life of wholeness God intends for us, why we can struggle to experience it, and practical steps to heal and flourish. So how do you continue in wholeness?

First, by growing in a personal friendship with God; seeing him rightly as your loving Father who delights in you, values you, and cares for you.

If you wouldn't say you know God personally, you can start a relationship with Him today. Simply put, God is perfect, loves you, and desires to know you (Deuteronomy 32:4). Yet we are all born broken and have all done wrong (Romans 3:23). We hurt God, ourselves, and others. Despite this, we are valuable to God. That's why God came to this earth in the form of a man, Jesus, to live a perfect life of obedience to God for us, never doing wrong (John 3:16). He was murdered on a cross, taking the penalty for our wrongs, and rose from the dead in victory over evil (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). You can receive forgiveness and have a personal relationship with God simply by asking Him for it (Romans 10:9).

Second, by developing a healthy relationship with yourself. Becoming emotionally aware, healthy, and understanding your deepest God-given longings and how He has created you to experience their fulfillment. Additionally, understanding and living from a place of steadfastness by knowing your God-given worth and how much God loves you.

Third, being fully known and fully loved by safe people who support you, don't judge you, and who know even the things you're afraid to share. Living a life of serving others sacrificially, loving them, and sharing Jesus with them.

Just as unmet longings lead to unwanted behaviors, met longings lead to thriving. Practically, you can go to God and others daily for the love, acceptance, and support you need.

Over time, as you have experiences of your longings being met, you'll develop positive core beliefs about God, yourself, and others that replace the lies. You'll begin to thrive again.

CONSIDER:

1. What next steps will you take to experience wholeness?

SCRIPTURE:

ROMANS 3:23-25, 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8, ROMANS 10:9, JOHN 17:23, JOHN 13:34