



Human Flourishing: The Acts of Selfless Love

Jamie Wright

New Mexico Military Institute

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Abstract

Servant leadership is letting go of *self* and focusing on the needs of others. Evaluating the benefits of human flourishing and reaching beyond ourselves allows us to serve others better, find purpose in our calling, and serve those who need it most. This paper tells the story of serving those evacuees from the Ruidoso Fire on June 17, 2024. It also examines the song and movie "I Can Only Imagine" about a man's hate towards his father and then, as his father grew closer to Jesus, his father became his best friend before passing. This paper discusses different types of human flourishing while involving intercultural communication and servant leadership. The focused areas are self-pleasing and self-gratification, a resting place, bringing hope through serving, a safe place, achieving goals and teachable moments, and the importance of effective communication.

Keywords: Mathew 5-6, intercultural communication, human flourishing, fire evacuees

Introduction

Human flourishing? What is human flourishing? I have pondered this myself for many days, hours, and minutes as I began to write this article. I have interviewed many individuals from age 17 to 70. When asked what the meaning of human flourishing is, the following were some of the answers:

- Self-fulfillment.
- Successful and thriving in their careers.
- Finding peace in their environments.
- Creating a safe place for individuals to cope.
- Humans doing well in a specific environment.

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- Knowing, living, and sharing the love of God.
- Someone who is positively growing in their life and being fruitful.
- Living life to the fullest! A life that is filled with abundant joy and making many happy memories with people you love the most! Having peace that surpasses all understanding! This comes only from having a relationship with Jesus!
- Being successful? A person flourishing in life.
- Understanding your purpose, has healthy relationships, knows how to communicate their needs, and has a good sense of self-worth. When you have these things, it leads to other success as well.
- A person who is becoming who God has made them to be.
- Human flourishing is self-sacrificing and helping others reach their full potential as an individual, creating a safe place for growth, and overcoming hurdles, so you can reach your full potential by being the leader God has chosen you to be. Creating a safe place of boundaries, helping others before you help yourself.
- Letting go of preconceived notions of what you or others think your life should look like. Finding contentment in what it looks like right at the moment. After doing this, then you can find space to flourish. Otherwise, you are always seeking and never truly happy.
- Humans progressing or improving.
- A person who is happy and possibly healthy and fit.
- Happy with life, content with circumstances, and being willing to grow.

As you can see, people have different answers about what human flourishing is. Human flourishing is being content with your circumstances and being willing to find joy during the trial. Learning to find joy amidst the pain and finding laughter during the hard times represents a time of growth and contentment. There are circumstances we cannot control; we can decide to be Debbie Downers or Rays of Sunshine.

Psalms 16:11 (*New King James Version [NKJV]*, 1996) reads, “You show me the path of life, In your presences there is fullness of Joy; At your right hand are pleasure for evermore.” The term *human flourishing* has only developed over the past two decades. The traditional translations come from the Greek word *eudaimonia*, which refers to happiness. *Eudaimonia* was meant to be objective, not subjective (Rasmussen, 1999, p. 2) Rasmussen (1999) wrote, “Human flourishing is that-for-the-sake-of-which human conduct is done, and though flourishing is dependent on human agency for its achievement, it does not depend on such agency for its status as the ultimate end” (p. 3) Human flourishing is a way of living. It is a way to express oneself. Some would say human flourishing is being successful, whereas some might say it is helping others find a safe place to grow and reach their full potential. Some might envision human flourishing as a lush green garden bubbling up with life and springs of water. The truth

is human flourishing is what you make it. It is truly what you perceive with your own eyes.

In *Servantology: The Periodic Elements of Servant Leadership*, Christopher P. Meade (2023) created a periodic table for servant leadership using the periodic table of elements as a format. This creative idea really resonates with the servant leader. Though an entire article could be written on his book, I am only highlighting the 22 elements he created.

1. Accountability (AC) Calcium

2. Awareness (AW) Silver

3. Character (CH) Iron

4. Community (CO) Sodium

5. Compassion (CM) Nickel

6. Developer (DV) Nitrogen

7. Empathy (EQ) Boron

8. Forward Thinking (FT) Silicon

9. Grit (GT) Tungsten

10. Growth (GR) Diamond

11. Guts (GU) Titanium

12. Humility (HU) Argon

13. Inclusivity (IC) Lithium

14. Influence (IN) Carbon

15. Listening (LI) Oxygen

16. Others-Centered (OT) Helium

17. Service (SV) Platinum

18. Sponsor (SP) Hydrogen

19. Transformation (TN) Uranium

20. Trust (TR) Gold

21. Truth Telling (TT) Neon

22. Vulnerability (VN) Mercury

Each element is a character of servant leadership. These elements represent a piece of servant leadership. Servant leadership is built up of different attributes and characteristics within the human realm. According to Sendjaya (2010), “Servant leadership stems from a heartfelt conviction and a desire to transform other people with moral courage and spiritual insights into what they are capable of becoming” (p. 45). When evaluating what human flourishing is, it truly is helping others and building them up. It is not about you and your wants and desires. It is about the willingness to let go of self and serve those who need it most. This brings us to the summer of 2024 when I had the privilege of serving at the New Mexico Dream Center after the entire village of Ruidoso, New Mexico was mandated to evacuate.

Bringing Hope Through Serving

Several fires surrounded the Ruidoso Downs, New Mexico area, on June 17, 2024. The entire village was mandated to evacuate. Roads were closed. The only way out was the road towards Roswell, New Mexico. In less than 3 hours, shelters were being formed across the town of Roswell to house the evacuees from the fires. For the first time in years, the community came together and was united as one. 3 John 1:2 [NKJV], 1996 reads, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”. I had the opportunity to work at the New Mexico Dream Center for two weeks where we hosted multiple families. Some lost everything, and others had everything to return to, except the structures around them were gone. Even amid chaos and uncertainty, the church served those in need.

A Resting Place

The evacuees who were served were so thankful for everything. For Ruidoso, Roswell has always had a bad taste in their mouth – as the town does not have the best reputation. Their minds were changed by the hospitality, the love, the safe place, the hope, the prayers, and the overwhelming support of donations, money, and food that

were provided to help get them back on their feet. The most beautiful thing I witnessed was forming a circle and praying for rain. New Mexico rarely gets rain, and people were in doubt. We needed the rain fast to help put out the fires. It was a Tuesday, and it was not scheduled to rain until later in the week. Within hours, it began to pour. The fires were slowly contained and put out. However, with nothing to stop the rain, floods came and destroyed properties and homes, and more homes were lost rather than saved. The Ruidoso Fires destroyed over 1,400 structures. Another version of 3 John 1:2 (*New Living Translation, 1996*) reads, “Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.” This scripture signifies your body is healthy and your mind is of Christ. When I think of human flourishing, I think of a safe place, a peaceful resting place, somewhere you feel comfortable to grow and be yourself, and you are being nourished or you are helping to nourish others.

Self-Pleasing and Self-Gratification Human Flourishing

Mark Batterson (2017) wrote in his book *Whisper: How to Hear the Voice of God* that it was Paul who stated, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition” (p. 87). God wants to kill our selfish ambition and create a godly ambition. The real question is, why are you doing what you are doing? What is the motivation behind your intention? Batterson wrote, “We’re all driven by too much selfish ambition, but none of us has nearly enough godly ambition” (p. 87). Do not let your intentions be the wrong motives – always have the mind of Christ.

Check Your Ego

Before even doing the task, we must check our ego at the door. Every day, we must surrender ourselves to Christ at the altar. If you do not have an altar, surrender yourself on your knees. Commit each day before the Lord. If you do not check your ego, your mission and purpose could end up being all about you. Batterson (2017) advised, “Having pride is letting ego have the loudest voice. And attempting to do God’s will in a spirit of pride is two steps forward, three steps back” (p. 88).

What is Your Mission?

Human flourishing is not always about yourself, your wants, and your desires. It is having the right motive of why you are doing what you are doing. If you are trying too hard to complete the task, you might be trying for the wrong reasons (Batterson, 2017, p. 88). If you are trying too hard, this could be an indicator you are not ready for the blessing. God is still equipping you for your mission. This could also indicate that what you are chasing is an idol in your life. Batterson wrote, “An idol is anything you desire more than God, and that includes God-given dreams and God-ordained callings” (p.

88). It often takes dying to our flesh, our wants, and placing them at the feet of Jesus, surrendering them over. Later, Jesus might give those desires back to us. He has to know we are ready to flourish, but he first needs all of us and this includes the idols.

Keep Your Emotions in Check

God gave us our emotions. He created us all in his image. When it comes to our emotions, do not make decisions when you are emotionally unstable—in an emotional state or stylish mood. This will only get you in trouble. Making rash and emotional decisions gets us in trouble. We may do something we will regret—like getting a tattoo or buying a new car (nice new payment). You did not think of signing up for a marathon without training. I have done this many times. This is self-pleasing and self-gratification. I enjoy running. I like the high I get from completing a race, although prepping for the race is much more enjoyable than competing without any training. James 1:19 (NKJV, 1996) reads, “So, then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” When dealing with our emotions, we need to keep ourselves in check, examining if we are doing the will of God.

Discerning the Choice

Before making a decision, sometimes the best thing to do is wait. Wait on the Lord for direction. Sometimes waiting is the best decision. When we wait to make a decision, the desire for the decision will either get stronger or weaker or go away. When you wait on Jesus and surrender your wishes to him, as you wait, if your urge to make the decision gets stronger, this could be a good possibility that it is from God. If the desire goes away, let it be, as it was not of God or the timing is not right (Batterson, 2017, p. 89).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a gift from God. Knowing how to use your emotional intelligence is being aware of what is going on around you. As we grow closer to God, we become more aware of our emotional intelligence and emotional awareness. We must know how to discern and help those in need. We must be willing to die to our flesh, pick up our cross, and follow Jesus. Romans 12:2 (NKJV, 1996) reads, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” We must daily renew our minds and keep our eyes focused on Christ. It is not about our self-pleasing or self-gratification but about serving and reaching others for Jesus.

I Can Only Imagine

When looking at human flourishing, the song “I Can Only Imagine” comes to mind. When viewing the movie of the same name, I finally understood the meaning behind the song. Bart Millard, the author of the song, had a band called Mercy Me, and they were trying to make it big. However, their music just was not making it. So, the producer deal told them to create something off the chart. Growing up, Bart’s father was a drunk, and his mother left him at a young age. Music was his outlet. His father would often tell Bart that he was never going to amount to anything, but Bart believed he was somebody. Bart took choir in school. There, he found his gift for singing. He went on the road and sang a few gigs. Later, his father was extremely sick. Bart took time off to be with his dad. Even though his dad was mean to him growing up, Bart found a way to serve him unconditionally until his last breath.

Human flourishing is also willing to go the extra mile and never give up – knowing your success, your worth, and your value. Bart never gave up. After his father passed away, he released his powerful hit song “I Can Only Imagine.” Bart imagined being with his father. The story behind the song has passion and fire to speak to those who are hurting, going through trials, and thinking of quitting. Bart never gave up and remained steadfast in his faith. He used his talents to glorify God and to reach the lost and hurting.

Achieving Goals and Teachable Moments

Servant leadership is not about yourself but about helping to lead others to successful moments. One of my greatest accomplishments is not being successful but watching others become successful in their career path. As a professor, my favorite moment is when students start to believe in themselves like you believe in them. Kent M. Keith (2024) wrote, “You need to know yourself so you can lead authentically. You also need to know what impacts you have on others, so you can lead *effectively*” (p. 32).

You might be asking yourself, What does it mean to truly know who you are? What does it mean to be a servant leader who helps others flourish? It is not about where you go. It is about who you know. I would imagine you have had flourishing moments where you climbed your highest mountain to achieve your biggest accomplishments. I have had to overcome many obstacles to be where I am today. Growing up, I did not know who I was. I did not have the confidence to flourish, I believed the lies I was told by my peers and some teachers. As I grew older and more mature, I allowed people to speak the truth into my life. I realized my true destiny. I had to find out who I was, who I was as a person, who I was as an individual, and truly know who I was in Christ.

According to Henri Nouwen (2013), “Life is God’s initiative and can end or change suddenly, unexpectedly, and unpredictably. When we humans are ready to give up hope and resign ourselves to inevitability, God intervenes and reveals new beginnings” (p. 86). I think we could all agree that *life happens* and is *uncontrollable*. Many times I have wanted to throw in the towel. I have thought multiple times in my teaching career, Am I truly making a difference? Is it worth the pain and sacrifice? In the darkest moments of my life, the moments when I wanted to quit or ended up having another medical procedure (I have had more than most people), it was then I realized how much God was working everything out for my good. He was behind the scenes doing his construction work when I was on the front lines thinking I was not going to make it. If I had quit during the hard times in my life, I would never have accomplished the victories in my life. God has intervened multiple times. He has shown up and proved to me time and time again that he is the God of miracles.

Flourishing Effective Communication

Human flourishing and effective communication go hand in hand. It is hard for one to flourish if they do not have effective communication. Human flourishing is serving our neighbor. According to Michael Berg (2020), “God serves our neighbors through us as we carry out our vocations” (p. 5). Vocation is just a fancy word for calling or career. Each person on earth was created in God’s precious image, and each individual has a calling in their life. Some are called to be mothers, wives, lawyers, teachers, doctors, nurses, technical workers, etc. As Christians, we are set apart, no matter what our vocation is. We are called to perform acts of love – to love our neighbor as Christ loved the church. This means you are to stand apart – not be part of the crowd (Berg, 2020). Human flourishing and effective communication is being able to understand the three phases of intercultural communication. Hofstede et al. (2010) elaborated on the three phases of intercultural communication: awareness, knowledge, and skills.

Awareness means you are aware of the culture and what is taking place mentally. This is realizing everyone you interact with was brought up differently. Developing effective communication within human flourishing is being aware of each individual so you can serve them well.

Knowledge might be self-explanatory; however, to interact with other cultures, one must know the culture. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), “We should learn about their symbols, their heroes, and their rituals; while we may never share their values, we may at least get an intellectual grasp of where their values differ from ours” (p. 420). To serve others well, we must be willing to learn their culture, so we can communicate effectively, as well as relate to them.

The third phase – *skills* – is putting Phases 1 and 2 into practice. This means we must be willing to apply the skills we have learned about our culture, so we can effectively communicate to help them flourish in their careers and be able to serve them well. Remember, servant leadership is not about us, it is about meeting the needs of those we encounter to help them thrive and flourish in their career path. Hofstede et al. (2010) wrote, “Persons with unduly inflated egos, a low personal tolerance for uncertainty, a history of emotional stability, or known racist or extreme left- or right-wing political sympathies should be bad risks for a training program” (p. 420). Intercultural communication is truly knowing who you are working with, setting aside your needs and wants, and focusing on their needs and wants. It is hard to serve those in need if you are always focused on your wants and desires. Effective communication is understanding the culture you are working with.

Trust and Rapport

It is natural to think we can just walk up to someone and build trust and rapport to get into their bubble. Wrong! We have to build trust over time. This is the same with helping someone to flourish; you cannot just jump in their bubble and expect them to be your bestie. Zetta Hammond (2015) wrote, “Rapport is generally defined as a ‘sympathetic connection’ with another person that results in that warm, friendly feeling you get when you are in sync” (p. 75). Being in sync means you are connected. Being connected means affirmation. Affirmation means “I get you!” which means you care about them (Hammond, 2015, p. 76). To build effective communication, you have to show the individual, group, or team that you care and have compassion. It is important to build trust so you can have effective communication. Once you have effective communication, you can help them to flourish. Human flourishing is helping those around you to grow and flourish beyond yourself. It is act of selfless love. Hammond wrote, “You can try to speed the trust-building process, but feeling connected grows slowly and requires time for people to get to know each other” (p. 77). These interactions happen on a day-to-day basis. Growing rapport happens with your motives, your character, and your words and reassuring them they can do anything with Christ. Serving those in need comes from your heart; it is dying to your flesh and serving beyond your means.

Conclusion

Human flourishing is letting go of self, serving those in need, and building rapport and trust, so you can have effective communication in a diverse society. Human flourishing is being successful, finding contentment within the chaos, finding peace during moments of hurt, overcoming hurdles, and not letting lies stop you from achieving your greatest accomplishment. Human flourishing is serving others before yourself, helping

others achieve their dreams, and cheering them on while they make their mark. Servant leadership and human flourishing are knowing your limits, using effective communication, understanding others' cultures, and knowing with God all things are possible. Simon Sinek (2014) wrote, "The world around us is filled with danger. Filled with things trying to make our lives miserable. It's nothing personal; it's just the way it is" (p. 25). The world will try and tear you down, people will try and misguide you; however, God is always there for you. He has placed a calling on each of our lives, and it is up to us to listen to his still small voice. People will fail you. The world will fail you. But Jesus will never fail you.

Author's Biography

Dr. Jamie Wright has been teaching in academia since 2013. She has excelled in the career path she has chosen. Dr. Wright is an Associate Professor, with the speech faculty for New Mexico Military Institute, where she teaches Public Speaking, Intercultural Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Introduction to Communication, and is in charge of the Ruppert-Burton Speech Contest. She is resilient, loved by her students and colleagues, and always goes the extra mile. She earned her Doctor of Strategic Leadership degree in May 2021 from Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where she was a Doctoral Fellow for the School of Communication. She is a 2017 graduate from Eastern New Mexico University where she obtained a Master of Arts in Communication. In 2012, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from West Virginia University of Parkersburg, West Virginia.

Dr. Wright has been extremely successful not only in her academic career but in her personal life as well. She loves to do research and edit scholarly papers and books for colleagues and former students. She enjoys spending time with her husband, Chris, and her two chocolate Labs – Biscuit and Beau Jangles. For fun, Jamie enjoys running marathons, traveling the world, serving in the community, attending sporting events, gardening, attending church, serving at church events, and spending time with friends and family. She has a love for the educational system, a passion for helping students thrive in and out of the classroom and mentoring students on the career path they have chosen. She is one of a kind and the best in my eyes. Even in her darkest hours, her hope was found in Jesus. Jesus has been her guide and continues to lead her on the path on which he has called her.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Dr. Jamie M. Wright
Email: jwright@nmmi.edu

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