

THRIVING OR STRIVING?

By Margaret Shepherd

She was ninety-four the last time I saw her. She had become diabetic a few years back and her right leg had been amputated, so she was now in a wheelchair. In my childhood she had a lot of lap to sit on and sturdy shoulders to cry on. Now she had diminished to maybe eighty pounds. Her bright eyes had dulled into blindness. But she still sat up straight and her mind was clear.

Aunt Alva and Uncle George had been financially prosperous. They lived well. But, his extended illness before he died, and now hers, had left her dependent on government benefits. There was no more family money for the private nursing home, so she had moved to this place. It was about as bad as such places can be. You've heard the stories and read the articles. You know what I mean.

What was my beloved Aunt Alva doing in this place? Her physical body was dying. Most of her loved ones were gone. She was reduced to living in hideous conditions. Poor care, dirty, bad food, raving dementia patients roaming the halls. It hurt me to see her there. What was she doing in this place?

Thriving. SHE WAS THRIVING. She spoke cheerfully of how well she was treated, how pleasant the staff was, how much fun it was to get to know new people, how grateful she was to be cared for, and that the Lord had left her faculties and all her wonderful memories. She even said she was sure the food was very nutritious. This was truly her reality. She was thriving. It didn't look like it to an observer, but in her reality she was thriving. She met all the definitions.

The dictionary definition of thriving is: *To make steady progress; to prosper; to grow vigorously; to flourish. Thriving is about expansion, vitality, joy, fulfillment, creativity, expression, success, energy, vibrancy, forward motion, happiness.*

When you thrive you are in an upward spiral of positive energy. Life is exhilarating. You are confident, joyful and fulfilled. The Law of Attraction brings you more for which to be grateful and joyful.

Thriving is an experience of the soul. Thriving is an awareness of God's active presence--the reality of heaven on earth, now. As you become aware of the inner reality of thriving you begin to experience it in your outer experience as well. Just as Aunt Alva did. The law will act upon your inner focus and manifest it outwardly. You will live in the kingdom of your personal heaven, just as she did.

The opposite of thriving is STRIVING. When you experience anything less than ease of life you are striving. The dictionary definition of striving: *To exert much effort or energy; endeavor; to struggle or fight forcefully; to contend (as in contentious).*

Striving is about effort, anxiety, pain, work, difficulty, failure, and fear. Many of us live there too often. Striving. Until we wake up from the hypnotism of our negative beliefs, life is about strife.

The problem with so much of what we achieve in life is that it seems so hard won. Look at what you have achieved in your life. Who you are, what you have accomplished and what you have acquired. How much of that has come effortlessly and joyfully? Have you felt a sense of thriving in the process? Have you believed the messages in your culture that life is a struggle, that you must work hard and suffer and sacrifice for success? Or, that you must somehow earn it and deserve it?

If you don't know it yet then I am here to tell you none of that is true. Striving is unnatural. Remember about the lilies of the field? No striving there, just glorious creation. Take a moment to consider--truthfully--areas of your life where you are striving. Write them down. Why are those experiences of striving? What keeps you striving? While the areas in which we thrive and strive are unique to each of

us, the reasons why we don't fully thrive are universal. What keeps you striving? Here are some wrong beliefs that can keep you in striving: That life is a struggle. You must suffer in order to attract good to your life. There is evil opposing you. There is a force greater than God that can harm you. Fear of failure, fear of pain, fear of success.

Your reality is created by your beliefs. Where thought goes, energy flows. Your thoughts come from your deepest beliefs, many of which are unconscious. Your thoughts are the power by which your life experiences are created. There is nothing else. Change your thoughts and change your life. Ernest Holmes, Science of Mind founder said, "Ignorance of the law does not change its result, when there is no longer anything in our mentality that denies our word then a demonstration will be made...for the law is absolute." (SOM 300)

As you consider your life in terms of thriving or striving, let's look to where the healing truth always lies, in the spiritual truth. While thriving is a spiritual experience, striving is a state of human struggle that has no spiritual counterpart. You are programmed to thrive, there is that within you that knows how to thrive.

Thriving is the natural order of life. As a human being you have been programmed by God to thrive. Look to nature for illustrations of thriving. Forests live in symbiosis with their environment and thrive, effortlessly. Unless humans pollute them, bodies of water thrive, naturally. Wildflowers make no apparent effort to thrive on the roadside. Even weeds in the lawn and viruses that resist antibiotics are programmed to thrive. Thriving is the truth of life and the truth of your being.

The spiritual kingdom is absolutely about thriving, and it is yours right here and right now. The kingdom that God has made exists unsullied by human fears and ego and negativity. Where all is harmony, abundance, peace and beauty, where thriving is a given.

You can live there now. You do not have to earn it through struggle and suffering, you do not have to deserve it by obeying dogma or rules. It is your birthright.

Look again at your list of areas in which you strive. What would it be like for you to be thriving all the time? Can you imagine yourself in an upward spiral to an effortless higher experience of living? When you think of thriving, you imagine what heaven on earth is for you. Heaven is not a location somewhere up in the sky. Heaven is an individual idea. We each experience it from our personal values and desires.

What does thriving mean to you? How do you know when you're thriving? The only way to know you are thriving is to search for that inner feeling, the inner knowing. To apply outer standards doesn't work because they are applied to what *looks* like thriving, as defined by some external criteria. Recognizing thriving is a noetic kind of knowing. Noetic means inner knowing, not by outer means.

You can meet the outer standard of apparent good health, for example, yet know within yourself that something is wrong, and find out the next week that you had been developing a cold. You can have the outer appearance of a happy marriage, yet within yourself know you are unfulfilled, unsatisfied, unhappy. Conversely, you can appear externally to be a failure or in a life of misery, yet know inwardly that you are thriving. You can be thriving as my Aunt Alva taught us to thrive.

What moves you to thriving?

There are some *attitudes* you must have, and there are some *actions* you can take to transform your life to thriving.

The first attitude is to "resist not evil." "Turn away from the condition, turn the other cheek." (SOM 303) "And a man's foes, be they of his own household..." (Matthew 10:36) "There are no enemies external to our own mind." (SOM text)

This attitude is necessary because, remember, what gets your attention, gets your life; what you intend is what you create. The second attitude is to surrender to God--to the flow of God's presence in your life, the inner wisdom and guidance and loving care orchestrating your heaven on earth.

The first action you must take is to know your heaven: what thriving means to you. Work with the areas of striving you listed. Ask yourself what thriving instead would look like. Describe it in writing. Remember thriving is an inner awareness of Perfect Life that manifests in your outer experience. Develop for yourself a personal phrase, or an affirmation that describes the kingdom of your heaven. The second action you must take is to manage your energy flow. Focus your energy on thriving, on your kingdom of heaven. Focus on living from a higher place. Draw energy from the universe and focus it. Consciously manage its flow.

The universe will operate in your favor. This is God in action on your behalf. You will attract energy to you to fulfill your desires. It will come in the form of money, opportunities, ideas, inspiration, and all necessary resources.

The spiritual support you need to overcome the fears that keep you small is there too. Spirit is always helping you if you simply accept.

Take a quiet moment, then state to yourself what you are willing to do to move yourself into thriving. Make an agreement with yourself. Commit to changes in your attitudes and actions. Be specific and write down your commitment. Keep it with you. Go ahead. Get in sync with the natural order of life.

Thrive.