

THRIVING IS MORE THAN SURVIVING. IT IS LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL.



Implicit in the statement is the notion that life as human beings is inherently challenging, difficult and problematic.

As humans, we are born into an imperfect world. Not even the richest or healthiest person can escape death. Life is terminal. And some are born into more difficult contexts and will face more difficult circumstances than others.

But the statement above is also one of hope and promise. Despite whatever difficult circumstances we are born into or experience, it is possible to live life to the full. This is not to say we will escape disease, suffering, death, or the breakdown of relationships at some point in our life. But it is still possible to live a full life, one of contentment and peace even in the midst of the chaos; a life that, when looked back on, can be accurately evaluated as a life well lived. We have a choice to live life to the full, despite the inherent difficulties of being human in an imperfect world. What does it mean then, to live life to the full?

HOW CAN IT BE FOSTERED OR CREATED?



Living life to the full is more than surviving. It is more than just getting by without losing the will to live, literally or metaphorically. It is also more than just being resilient in the face of adversity.

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is “The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats and even significant sources of stress.”¹ Experiencing fullness of life is more than just adapting well to whatever life throws at us. There is no doubt, however, that developing resilience is important. It is a capacity and skill we can develop and a signpost on the journey from barely surviving, to surviving, to thriving. We cannot fully thrive without developing our resilience muscles. But it does not stop there.

Fullness is also about flourishing and thriving. It means constantly choosing to grow in every area of our lives throughout our time here on earth. It means growing spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally, in our relationships, and in making our contribution to the world as part of our unique purpose in life. It does not have a clear beginning point or destination. By its very definition, it is about growth and development that is progressive and ever-changing. It requires intention and is a perspective or a posture of the heart.

1. (Steven M. Southwick, and Dennis S. Charney, Resilience: The science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges, p.7)

More recent psychological literature, positive psychology and post-traumatic growth psychology, has begun to provide increasing evidence that human beings do not have to settle with just surviving or adapting in the face of difficulties life throws at them. Rather, they are discovering how people grow and thrive through and beyond the adversities and traumas of life.

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WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT AN INDIVIDUAL IS THRIVING?

There are eight areas of life that, taken together, can help us assess where we are living life to the full and where we are not. Then we can take concrete action to improve and grow in those areas.

1. Family and home (marriage, children, extended family relationships)
2. Spiritual and ethical (giving back, altruism, finding meaning and purpose in life)
3. Physical and health (physical environment, health, wellness)
4. Mental and educational (improving mental health, learning, personal development)
5. Social -- friends (developing social cohesion)
6. Cultural (lifestyle, leisure, adventure, travel, fun)
7. Financial (sufficient financial resources to at least cover basic human needs)
8. Work (meaningful and satisfying work)



A person who is experiencing life to the full is a person who is content and at peace, despite their circumstances. This is not easy to come by. It is hard won. It is a capacity, like resilience, that we must practice and develop like any muscle in our physical body.

In part, it can be achieved through practicing gratitude for the life that we have whilst seeking to grow and improve our circumstances. Gratitude helps us to identify and focus on resources we already have in each area of our life rather than on what we lack. Choosing to live and grow from this perspective, rather than out of a perspective of scarcity, promotes fullness.

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This fullness also comes as we seek to develop the art of sufficiency, or 'enoughness'—being enough and having enough.

First, it is about being content with who we are, knowing that we are enough. We cease striving and competing with others or trying to become someone we are not. It is about recognising our strengths, weaknesses, failures and successes. People who do not feel they are enough are driven by fear, greed and their approach to life is zero-sum; if someone else wins, I lose. They are restless.

People who view themselves as being enough are motivated by love and altruism. Their approach to life is win-win; there are enough resources (emotional, spiritual, financial, etc.) to go around. For them, life is about cooperation and collaboration which flows from the abundance of resources, internal and external, rather than the ceaseless competition and strife that flows from the fear of scarcity and of missing out.





'Enoughness' is also about achieving a sufficiency of resources, enough to sustain our lives physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is not about greed or the pursuit of infinite material wealth at the expense of others. We may never be financially wealthy, but material wealth does not guarantee fullness or abundance. Some of the most miserable people alive are those with every resource imaginable at their disposal. To the extent that they have not achieved inner peace and contentment, they are not living a life of abundant fullness.

People who experience fullness have moved from greed to altruism. They naturally give back to others out of the overflow of their hearts. They have a moral compass; they act out of a code of ethics that gives their life meaning and fullness. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and seek to live with integrity according to their moral code.

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Their lives are characterised by selflessness, a concern for the welfare of others and a desire to give back to others with no expectation of benefit to themselves. They are concerned about injustice and are compelled by love to actively challenge it for themselves and less fortunate others.

Fullness is also part of what it means to be spiritually healthy. Whether we are religious or not, we have an abundance of inner resources (creativity, imagination, resourcefulness, and playfulness) upon which to draw. Fullness of life also comes as we constantly discover our meaning and purpose in life. This fullness of life, in finding our place of having and being enough, of finding peace and contentment amid whatever life brings, both good and bad, is what it means to live in abundance. Nothing can buy these gifts. They must be cultivated.



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