Making Room for God

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Lessons in flourishing and accompaniment from the woman of Shunem
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Introdution

Tēnā koutou, e ngā Kaiārahi Wairua kua huihui mai nei i tēnei rā

It's a privilege to be with you this morning as we open God's word. I acknowledge and honour you for the spaces you inhabit, the mahi you offer and the wairua you carry as you accompany others in Spiritual direction. As someone who has benefited so much from this ministry, I'm grateful for each of you. Ngā mihi nui kia koutou.

Hare mai au kia koutou
I runga I te ingoa o ihu karaiti
Me te aroha o te Atua
I runga I te kaha o te Wairua Tapu, Amine

I come to you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
By the Grace of God
In the Power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

A Spirituality of Flourishing

As a young youth pastor in Kenya, I had a group of six young men—university students I was discipling. I longed for them to flourish—not merely to survive university as Christians, but to become rooted in God, resilient in the face of difficulty, and fruitful in purpose.

I realised I needed to spend more time with them, so I found a forgotten basement room at Nairobi Chapel and turned it into a sanctuary. Every week at 6:00 AM, they left behind the chaos of university life, came downstairs, and were greeted with a warm cup of tea and a piece of toast. In that quiet space, they felt secure and free from the need to perform. We learned together to listen for God's voice and intentionally make room for His transforming

presence. They flourished and all became exceptional leaders. Reflecting on those years, I marvel at what God accomplished.

1. Naming Our Shared Longing

Friends, as people who accompany others spiritually, we share a deep longing: Don't we?
That those we journey with flourish—rooted in God, resilient in difficulty and fruitful in God's purpose for their lives. Spiritual direction serves this longing by helping directees attend and respond to God's initiative.
Yet many who come to us feel fragmented, hurried or perhaps spiritually thin. If we are honest, sometimes we do too. Our vocation is not to manufacture an experience, dispense quick answers or become indispensable.

It is to offer prayerful companionship in which another can notice where God is already present and active.

And as we do so, lives flourish.

2. A Biblical Vision of Flourishing.



As I think of flourishing, I think of The African baobab tree.
A. **Rooted:** Its extensive roots gather scarce water whenever it becomes available. Flourishing begins with drawing life deeply from God rather than depending on favourable circumstances.
B. Resilient: The baobab is adapted to Kenya's hot, dry landscapes and can endure long seasons of drought. Flourishing is not freedom from hardship, but the capacity to remain alive and grounded through it.
C. Fruitful/Life-giving: Even in an arid environment, it produces nourishing fruit, which is a nutrient-dense superfood, sustaining life during times of scarcity. Its leaves provide shelter for the community and the ecosystem.

The African baobab flourishes not because its environment is easy, but because it is deeply resourced, resilient through drought and fruitful for others. Scripture presents flourishing not as success without struggle, but as life rooted in communion with God. Psalm 1 pictures a tree planted beside streams of water; Jeremiah shows that the same tree can remain green when heat and drought come; Jesus names the source of life and fruitfulness us to: "Abide in me" (John 15:4); Across these texts, flourishing is rooted, resilient and fruitful.

- **Rooted** — drawing life from God rather than from circumstances.
- **Resilient** — not untouched by heat or drought, but sustained through them.
- **Fruitful** — becoming a life through which the love and life of God can reach others.

Rooted. Resilient. Fruitful.
The woman of Shunem shows us what flourishing life looks like.

In 2 Kings 4:8–37, she makes room for God by receiving God's servant with hospitality, recognises God's presence through Elisha before anything dramatic occurs, returns in grief and with courageous honesty, and receives restored life as a gift.

Her story will guide our reflection on both personal flourishing and flourishing within the ministry of spiritual direction.

The question we're exploring today is: *What kind of room are we helping people make for God—and what kind of room for God are we making within ourselves?*

What a story of courageous faith. This woman is unnamed, yet unforgettable. Right?

She models the kind of agency we seek to honour in those we accompany: a person who responds freely to God rather than being managed by another.

3. Four Movements of Flourishing

Let us now follow four recurring movements of spacious faith through the story: receiving the Holy by making room, recognising God's presence through attention, returning to God in crisis with honest persistence, and remaining open to God's restoring grace.

They are not a formula or a straight line, but postures of a life rooted in God. Each movement reveals something about the woman's flourishing, and each asks something of us as those who accompany others.

A. Receiving: Making Room



She begins by making room for Elisha: a meal, then a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp (vv. 8–10). Her hospitality says, "Your presence matters here." But the room does not remain a one-way gift.

Elisha receives her care, then turns towards the one who has cared for him. He notices her costly generosity—"You have gone to all this trouble for us"—calls

her into his presence, asks what can be done for her and offers to speak on her behalf (vv. 11–13). When she asks for nothing, he keeps attending: “What can be done for her?” Together, Elisha and Gehazi perceive the longing hidden beneath her self-sufficiency. She has no son, and her husband is old. She makes physical room for the prophet; the prophet makes relational room for her. She gives shelter; he gives attention. She receives the holy one into her home; he receives her unspoken need into his care. This is mutual hospitality: each becomes both host and guest, giver and receiver, and the room between them becomes a place where God’s gift can be welcomed.
Flourishing grows in this exchange. Hospitality is not simply what the strong offer the needy, or what a director provides for a directee. It is the grace of making room and allowing room to be made for us: offering attention and consenting to be affected; welcoming another’s story and recognising that God may address us through it. Mutual hospitality resists control because neither person owns the room. Both bring gifts, both carry need and both stand as guests before God.

Many lives resemble overfilled suitcases—nothing more can enter until something is released.

A question to reflect on is not just “What might I receive?” but also, “What might I release so that attention becomes possible?” Releasing and receiving belong together.

So we have this mutual reciprocity where in the sacred space-both director and directee offer and receive.

We offer attentive presence; we receive the directee’s trust, insight and lived experience as gifts.

Our roles remain distinct, and the director safeguards the space, yet neither owns it. Both come as guests of the Holy Spirit, open to being changed by God.

For reflection: What currently occupies the inner room that God may be inviting me to clear?

Where might God be inviting me to receive rather than to perform?

B. Recognising: Practising Holy Attentiveness.

She says, "*I know that this man … is a holy man of God*" (v. 9). Before anything dramatic happens, she notices. That noticing happens as she offered her gift of hospitality. Her faith is neither passive nor vague; it is attentive, discerning and active.

Flourishing people are not necessarily loud or spectacular; they are awake to God's movement in ordinary encounters.
Henri Nouwen writes, "*It is by being awake to God in us that we can increasingly see God in the world around us*."[1]

We help people recognise where God may already be present and active. Recognition is rarely forced; it grows through attention. We listen for recurring words, images, desires, resistance, bodily responses, consolation and moments of aliveness.

Story
I naturally do things quickly. I walk quickly, run quickly and speak quickly. That energy can be a gift, but it also places me in danger of moving past what needs to be noticed—in nature, in another person, within myself or in the quiet movement of God.

My own director once invited me to slow down and attend to what I felt, sensed and noticed-in silence for 3 hours! At first, I doubted that such attention would address the issue at hand. Yet as I slowed down, small movements of consolation became visible: peace in prayer, tears in worship and a stirring in Scripture. The problem had not vanished, but my awareness of God had deepened.
I am learning that attentiveness does not always solve the problem; sometimes it keeps me from rushing past the grace already present.

For Reflection: Where have hurry, fatigue, or the need to be useful narrowed my attention?

[1] Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca J. Laird, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), Kindle loc (xiii-xiv)

C. Returning: Remaining in Relationship Through Crisis

Her son dies in her arms. She places the child in the room she had prepared and moves purposefully towards Elisha. When Gehazi asks about her welfare, she answers, "It is well" (v. 26). The Hebrew word *shalom* can carry the sense of wholeness, welfare and peace, but her brief public answer is not the whole truth. At Elisha's feet she voices unguarded grief: *"Did I ask you for a son? Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?"* (v. 28). Biblical hope can hold shalom and protest together.
Flourishing is not the absence of pain; it is the capacity to keep returning, to remain in relationship with God within pain.

Pain may appear in different forms. It may surface as grief or anger, but it may also hide beneath composure, silence, spiritual language or the words "I'm fine."

We listen beneath the first answer without forcing disclosure. When safety and trust deepen, truth may come. Lament may then emerge as an expression of faith rather than its failure, and we need not hurry another towards resolution, defend God or turn mystery into an explanation.

In our cancel culture, many people sometimes withdraw from others, and even from God, when they are in pain.
We're called to help people return to God in crisis by accompanying them as they bring their whole truth into God's presence. Grief, anger, confusion, protest and silence can all become prayer. Because the Shunammite woman's protest is not edited out of Scripture, we need not edit pain out of another person's relationship with God.

For reflection: Is there a truth, grief or desire I might have kept outside the room?

D. Restoring: Receiving Life as Gift.

Elisha enters the room, shuts the door and prays (vv. 32–35), but this moment has been reached through the woman's courageous persistence. She acts decisively in crisis and refuses to leave Elisha until he comes with her: *"As*

surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you" (v. 30). Yet neither she nor the prophet controls the outcome. The restoration here is intimate, embodied and entirely dependent on God. Life is received, not engineered.

This keeps us humble eh?
We prepare the room, listen, pray, discern and accompany; we do not produce transformation. Do we?
We help people remain open to the restoring grace of God. We cannot guarantee it, control its timing or prescribe its form. Sometimes restoration appears as healing or reconciliation; sometimes as courage, truthful lament, community, renewed freedom, hope or grace for the next faithful step.

Our task is not to produce an outcome, but to help people receive what God gives—and to remain with them when no resolution is yet visible.

Reflection:

What is the next faithful step I can take to remain open to God's restoring grace?

So, we've followed the story of the Shunammite woman and traced four movements of flourishing—**receiving, recognising, returning and restoring**—and we have reflected on what each movement means for the way we accompany others.

4. Flourishing Begins With Us

Before we accompany others, we must allow God to accompany us.

The four movements we offer another—receiving, recognising, returning and restoring—must also shape our own life with God.

We cannot invite others into a spaciousness we consistently refuse ourselves. Flourishing is not a technique we apply; it is a life we receive—a life of abiding, truthfulness, receptivity and love, continually made available to God. So our calling is simple, though never easy: **make room, pay attention, tell the truth and remain open to grace.**

Because through Jesus, God has made room for us to know forgiveness, peace, freedom, hope and flourishing. Flourishing is not about striving but about making room for God to breathe his life into us.

A brief practice:

Place both feet on the floor. Let your hands rest open. Recall the small room in Shunem: bed, table, chair and lamp.

Ask quietly, "God, what room are you inviting me to make?" Allow a minute of silence.

Then ask, "What is one concrete act of spaciousness I can practise this week?"

7. Closing Blessing

May you be like the woman of Shunem:
attentive enough to recognise the sacredness of God's Presence,
generous enough to make room,
honest enough to name disappointment,
courageous enough to seek help,
and open enough to receive life as gift.
May those who sit with you find a room where nothing true needs to be hidden;
a room spacious enough for silence, lament, discernment and hope;
a room in which the Holy Spirit remains the true Director.

And may your own life be rooted and grounded in love,
abiding in Christ,
and made fruitful by the renewing presence of God.

May you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who fills you with life in abundance; may you know the love of the Father who welcomes you boldly into His throne room; and may you know the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, your constant director and comforter.

And the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always. Amen