



DAVID O. HARRISON

# THRIVE!

TURNING THE CHURCH  
RIGHT-SIDE UP

GROUP STUDY EDITION



THRIVE!

DAVID O. HARRISON

# THRIVE!

## TURNING THE CHURCH RIGHT-SIDE UP

A GROUP STUDY GUIDE FOR THE CHURCH  
AND THOSE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

ISBN: 9798321137420

© DAVID O. HARRISON 2024

PUBLISHED BY THRIVE! BOOKS

THRIVEBOOKS.CO



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

A SPECIAL OFFER .....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....	5
CITATIONS .....	6
ABOUT THE STUDY QUESTIONS .....	7
DEDICATION .....	9
SUE .....	10
THRIVING .....	15
SECTION ONE – IF... ..	25
CHAPTER 1 – IF AND LISTEN .....	26
CHAPTER 2 – IF AND HEAR .....	30
CHAPTER 3 – IF AND OBEY .....	35
CHAPTER 4 – IF AND VOICE .....	42
CHAPTER 5 – IF AND HEART .....	47
CHAPTER 6 – IF AND FAITH .....	51
CHAPTER 7 – IF AND BELIEVE .....	56
CHAPTER 8 – IF AND WORDS .....	60
CHAPTER 9 – IF AND JESUS .....	64
CHAPTER 10 – IF AND THRIVE .....	70
CHAPTER 11 – IF AND RELIGION .....	75
SECTION TWO – SUICIDE BY DISOBEDIENCE .....	82
CHAPTER 12 – MY WAY, OR THE HIGHWAY .....	83
CHAPTER 13 – WHY CHURCHES FAIL TO THRIVE .....	89
CHAPTER 14 – ME-ISM .....	96

# THRIVE!

SECTION THREE – WILLFUL THRIVING.....	99
CHAPTER 15 – WORSHIP .....	100
CHAPTER 16 – GO, INVITE, GATHER .....	105
CHAPTER 17 – TURNING THE CHURCH RIGHT-SIDE UP.....	110
CHAPTER 18 – NON-CONFORMISM – IT’S IN MY GENES.....	118
CHAPTER 19 – LEADERSHIP PART 1 – WHAT’S IN A NAME? .....	126
CHAPTER 20 – LEADERSHIP PART 2 – A CHARACTER STUDY .....	135
CHAPTER 21 – LEADERSHIP PART 3 – A LOOK IN THE MIRROR.....	140
CHAPTER 22 – THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM CHANGE.....	150
CHAPTER 23 – DREAMING .....	158
CHAPTER 24 – SO, YOU WANT TO BE A GOOD LEADER? .....	163
CHAPTER 25 – ABILITIES AND ROLES OF ELDERS AND DEACONS.....	167
CHAPTER 26 – NO MORE LIMBLESS BODIES.....	174
CHAPTER 27 – REPEATABLE, AVOIDABLE MISTAKES .....	185
CHAPTER 28 – TATTOOS, HATS, AND THE JOY OF THE VINE – PART ONE .....	188
CHAPTER 29 – TATTOOS, HATS, AND THE JOY OF THE VINE – PART TWO.....	198
CHAPTER 30 – WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP.....	209
CHAPTER 31 – DON’T WORRY – BE HAPPY!.....	220
CHAPTER 32 – TAKING SIDES.....	225
CHAPTER 33 – REVIVAL AND SALVATION.....	238
CHAPTER 34 – IF YOU WILL... DO YOU? WILL YOU? .....	243
EPILOGUE – WHOOPING, HOLLERING AND DANCING .....	248
APPENDICIES .....	253
APPENDIX 1. THE LOVING INTOLERANCE OF GOD .....	254
APPENDIX 2 – 49 COMMANDS OF JESUS .....	256
AM I GOING TO HEAVEN? .....	269

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID HARRISON was born and raised in England and emigrated to Canada in 1973 at the age of 21.

When he was 35, David became a Christ-follower. He is married and the father of two adult children. He attended a Brethren Bible Chapel in Scarborough for 25 years, ten of those years as an elder.

For 23 years David ran an audiovisual integration company in Toronto, Canada, catering primarily to universities, banks, and law firms.

In 2006 David founded Bus Stop Bible Studies<sup>1</sup>, a ministry which used public transit advertising panels to display messages of encouragement from the Word of God to many millions of people in Canada.

For 10 years David was the Board Chair of Daystar Native Christian Outreach, based on Manitoulin Island.

Now 'retired', David and his wife, Wendy, run a bed & Breakfast in Muskoka, and David (who failed miserably in English at school) has taken to writing as a hobby.

Contact: [dohauthor@gmail.com](mailto:dohauthor@gmail.com)

---

<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/BSBSIMAGINE](http://bit.ly/BSBSIMAGINE)

CITATIONS

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the Holy Bible, New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations taken from the Amplified® Bible (AMP), Copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. [www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)

The cover image features Sandro Botticelli's *La Carte de l'Enfer* (The Map of Hell) which is in the public domain.



## ABOUT THE STUDY QUESTIONS

**E**ach chapter includes five or six questions designed to encourage personal reflection and group discussion.

This book is meant to take you on a journey—one of learning and encouragement—focused on biblical ministry, church leadership, and helping your church thrive.

Ideally, the study group should involve not just those in leadership roles or considering leadership, but also the broader church membership. This way, everyone can better understand their own roles and responsibilities in building a thriving church community.

The book serves as both a study guide (the version you're holding) and a paperback book. Even if you're part of a study group, it's recommended that you read through the entire text as you would any other book. You don't need to limit yourself to one chapter per week.

Some chapters are brief—just a single page—while others are more in-depth. Study leaders may find it helpful to combine two or three shorter chapters into one session and focus on two or three key questions from each.

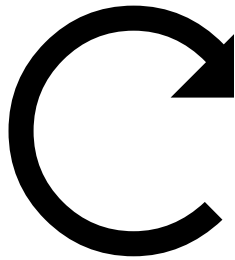
While some questions may feel repetitive, it's beneficial to answer them each time. This allows you to reflect on how your thoughts and understanding evolve throughout the study.

Most importantly, the goal of this study is to inspire positive change in your life and your church. You're encouraged to track and record any positive changes you notice. Doing so will not only help you stay motivated but also encourage others along the way.

THRIVE!

# My Way/Our Way

God's Way



# God's Way

My Way/Our Way

An old Puritan once said, *"Whenever a Christian tries to carve out his own path, he's sure to hurt himself."* Another wise teacher said, *"He who goes ahead of God's guidance is walking on a fool's errand."* Charles Spurgeon, MORNING AND EVENING, February 9.



DEDICATION

DEDICATION

To Sue and all those with a heart like hers.

SUE

“You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.”

Ephesians 2:19-21

**W**e have a good family friend; her name is Sue. For several years, Sue was a girls’ camp director. She then moved and worked with youth in her hometown. When Sue retired from ministry (an oxymoron), she started her own landscaping business and has been successful in that endeavour.

Her mom, Marj, is a dear church friend of ours who has, in recent years, succumbed to Alzheimer’s. Sue retrofitted her home so that she could be her mom’s full-time caregiver.

The only relief Sue gets from looking after her mom is a few hours on Sundays and three hours on Wednesday evenings when a Personal Support Worker comes by to take over her mom’s care. Sue shared with us, “I’ve come to hate my mom. Well, of course, I don’t hate her! I love my mom—with all my heart. I just hate what this awful disease has made her into.”

If you want an honest, heartfelt answer to a challenging situation, ask Sue.

Last summer Sue had the opportunity to drop by our place for a cup of tea and related an incredible story to us.

Sue lives a short distance from a small lake surrounded by several homes and a public park. One Wednesday evening, the PSW arrived. Sue needed to refresh her mind, so she grabbed her guitar, found a quiet spot amongst the trees beside the lake, and started quietly singing the worship hymn, *How Great Thou Art*. Shortly after she started, other voices from across the lake joined in. And then some more, and then

some more. A small group gathered around Sue, and a wonderful time of worship spontaneously arose. This small group agreed that they would get together at the same time the following week for a time of worship and prayer.

By the time fall came around, this group regularly numbered between 100 and 150 individuals.

On one occasion, a group of LGBTQ hecklers showed up, loudly mocking the group. One of the worshipers had a home on the lake, so the whole group moved there to continue their praise.

On another occasion, Sue happened to be away, and a couple of local pastors tried to take over the group and 'formalize it'. By the time Sue returned, the group had shrunk to only 30 or so. Although it's on hold for the winter season, the numbers fully rebounded after Sue returned.

Keeping the Acts 2 church foremost in mind, two significant outreaches have materialized from this motley band of worshippers. First, a ministry to tent-people was started for those who have no home and have become estranged from their families. The people involved in this ministry help to reconcile this homeless community with their loved ones. There have been some miraculous outcomes. The second ministry is 'Gourmet Hospitality'. Several individuals with excellent culinary skills treat shut-ins and people who can't easily leave their homes (like Sue) to a gourmet meal and a time of companionship.

Sue helped lead worship for twenty years in her home church and then took a year off. By her own admission, she loves being up front, "...where all the bright lights and recognition are." Now, she acknowledges, albeit with some frustration, that God is calling her in another direction.

Is God calling Sue to leave the comfort of her 'conventional church' to remind us of what Christ's Church should be reborn as?

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of

worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

John 4:23-24

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James 1:27

I think I know Sue quite well, and I believe she has a couple of things in common with King David; she has a few ‘rough edges’ and, I’m paraphrasing here<sup>2</sup>,

God testified concerning her: “I have found Sue, daughter of Marj, a woman after my own heart; she will do everything I want her to do.”

As I have already told Sue, I am sitting on the edge of my seat to see where God takes her next.

---

<sup>2</sup> Acts 13:22

**The following questions aim to inspire introspection, personal testimony, and group conversation, guiding you to collectively explore your beliefs and the scriptural foundations that support or challenge them.**

### QUESTIONS

1. How does the concept of being citizens of God's family, as mentioned in Ephesians 2:19-21, relate to Sue's actions and attitudes towards her mother and the community around her?

---

---

---

---

---

2. In what ways does Sue's caregiving for her mother reflect the biblical mandate to look after widows in their distress (James 1:27)? How does her experience challenge common perceptions of caregiving?

---

---

---

---

---

3. Reflecting on Sue's story, discuss how the spontaneous worship gatherings by the lake align with the idea of worshiping in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24) What lessons can be drawn from this about authentic worship and community?

---

---

---

---

---

4. How does Sue's transition from leading worship in a conventional church setting to engaging in grassroots ministry by the lake reflect a potential call from God? How does her journey parallel biblical examples of individuals called to unconventional paths of ministry?

---

---

---

---

---

5. How does Sue's personality and actions reflect being "a woman after God's own heart," like King David? What qualities or actions of Sue make you think of this, and how might they inspire her (or you) in serving God and others?

---

---

---

---

---

Additional thoughts:

---

---

---

---

---

## THRIVING

**A**n older woman who has recently started attending our church explained her reason for leaving her former fellowship. She said, “There have been many reasons, but when they started serving lemonade and stopped serving coffee due to lack of resources, well, that was the final straw.”

Everyone has a breaking point, but her statement revealed to me that her old church had failed to thrive. It may seem trivial – almost humorous if it weren’t so tragic – that the choice of lemonade or coffee should have been her ultimate breaking point, the straw that broke the camel’s back. What were the potential myriad reasons underlying that ‘final straw’?

Many books have been written on ways to attract people into the Church and help them find God, but they do not focus on the underlying causes of failure to thrive or the countless promises of God on how to thrive. Without a firm biblical foundation, all the programs in the world will not bring to life the Church God intended. This book focuses its attention on creating a foundation for *perpetual thriving*.

I want this to be a Book of Encouragement, not a Book of Condemnation. The opposite of ‘failure to thrive’ is excitingly described by Dr. Luke:

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:46-47



In Hebrew, seven words in the New International Version are translated as *thrive*. They are:

**Ga'ah** – to rise up, grow up, be exalted in triumph,

**Saba`** - to be satisfied, be sated, be fulfilled, be surfeited,

**Rabah** – to become many, become numerous, multiply,

**Tsuwts** – to blossom, shine, sparkle, flourish,

**Tsalach** – to advance, prosper, make progress, succeed, be profitable,

**Para'** – to bear fruit, be fruitful,

**Nuwb** – to bear fruit.

❑ Do each of these [Hebrew] words describe your church? IF not, why not (a question that will be asked frequently)? More importantly, do you want people to use these words as an accurate description of your church?

There's that word, IF. IF invokes a sense of optimism and limitless possibility.

Years ago, I learned a little about logic. IF is a *conditional statement* or an *implication*. God's favourite logic statement seems to be "IF, THEN," with numerous instances sprinkled throughout Scripture.

Technically, "IF, THEN" is a logical construct that establishes a relationship between two propositions, statements, or conditions. IF you DO this, you will succeed and IF you DO NOT DO this you will fail; IF you DO this you will be exalted and IF you DO this you will be condemned, etc.

One might logically rewrite Acts 2:46-47 as follows:

IF you meet together, AND IF you break bread AND IF you eat together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God, THEN you will enjoy the favour of all the people AND the Lord will add to your number daily those who are being saved."

That sounds exhilarating, doesn't it?

While we're on the topic of exhilaration, consider Acts 6:7 (and its context in 6:1-6),

So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

I don't want to convey that there is some Pollyanna magic formula for success. Dr. Luke also records how the early members of Christ's Church were persecuted, imprisoned, killed, and scattered. IF any of these things describe you, THEN you're probably doing something right, even if pain and suffering are involved. The early Church thrived in its suffering, and we are the direct beneficiaries.

*Fundamental* is an interesting word and is often used in religious conversation. As an adjective, fundamental means "forming a necessary base or core; of central importance". As a noun, fundamental means "a central or primary rule or principle on which something is based."

'IF, THEN' is a fundamental logic statement, meaning it is a central principle in logic.

I am a fundamentalist (don't put the book down yet!). It simply means that I believe in the fundamental truths of the Bible. Being a fundamentalist doesn't infer that I am, or need to be, legalistic—to the contrary. The Pharisees and Sadducees were fundamentalists, they were also legalistic and harshly condemned by Jesus for being so.

I find there is great freedom in being a fundamentalist because it takes the burden off me to somehow come up with complex theologies to define arguments. I simply need to (1.) read, listen to, and hear God's Word [in that order], (2.) understand what I am reading in its proper context, and (3.) apply the instruction in that context. IF I do these three things, THEN success or failure is God's responsibility, and God does not [cannot] fail. For example, in Malachi, chapter 3, God says that IF we tithe generously [in gratitude, in trust, and from the heart—the context], THEN He will

make it impossible for us to outgive Him. He then challenges us with an appeal, “Come on, try it<sup>3</sup> and let’s have some fun<sup>4</sup>!”

God is fantastic, isn’t He?

The first ten chapters of this book are based on simple, biblical IF statements. Think of them as a series of short devotionals before we get into the nitty-gritty of this book.

I have endeavoured to compose this book with answers and words of encouragement. Even so, it is sad to read in the Bible how often God has felt it necessary to use words of harsh condemnation.

Some of the concepts presented in this book may be considered contentious, or unconventional, but, as I note in a future chapter, “Scripture should always be interpreted (elaborated upon) by Scripture,”—just as Jesus did. If you find something written that you disagree with, are you able to support your argument with at least *three*, contextually relevant passages from Scripture?

❑ When we, who are leaders in Christ’s Church, look around at our congregations, wondering why individuals visit but don’t stay, why aren’t *all* members of the congregation involved in the activities of the church, why are people leaving, why aren’t people giving generously, etc.”, do we point the finger at the congregation, wondering what’s “Wrong with them?” or do we point the finger towards ourselves and ask, with humility, “What am I, or, what are we, doing wrong?”

It’s not as though God has not taught us how to thrive. As we will see; the Lord has spoken!

In the following passage, I have highlighted each of the conditional logic statements:

“IF you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, AND IF you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry AND

---

<sup>3</sup> Malachi 3:10

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 14:22-26

satisfy the needs of the oppressed, THEN your light will rise in the darkness, AND your night will become like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land AND will strengthen your frame.

[THEN] You will be like a well-watered garden, [AND] like a spring whose waters never fail.

[THEN] Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins AND will raise up the age-old foundations; [THEN] you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

“IF you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath AND from doing as you please on my holy day, IF you call the Sabbath a delight AND the Lord’s holy day honorable, AND IF you honor it by not going your own way AND not doing as you please or speaking idle words, THEN you will find your joy in the Lord, AND I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land AND to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 58:9a-14 NIV

When Kodachrome slides were a thing, one quickly learned that there are eight possible ways (orientations) to place a slide in the projector. Similarly, in the alphabet, the letters G, Q, and R have eight possible orientations. In both scenarios, only one orientation is correct.

If you put on a slideshow, every image will show something different and tell a unique story, but it will be irritating to watch if half the slides are upside down, sideways, or back-to-front. What would happen if people started writing without following the accepted practice of orienting G, Q, and R correctly? In each of these examples, we can see that there is one right way and seven wrong ways to do certain things. Is the Church any different in following biblical precepts?

Galileo had the unusual ability to mirror-write (writing text so that it appeared as a mirror image).<sup>5</sup>

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

Just as people would not want to watch a slideshow with all the slides jumbled up and out of order, neither would it be exciting, nor attract an audience, if every slide was the same image (boring). Similarly, one would become quickly frustrated reading a novel by Galileo using his unique style of penmanship!

Do certain churches fail to thrive because they are using leadership orientations 2 through 8, rather than the 1 way described in Scripture?

Churches should strive to be like a captivating slideshow, full of beautiful and wondrous images, or a book full of incredible characters, and an unbelievable story that is so exciting the reader simply can't put it down. But this only works if we pay attention to what we are creating, the story we are telling, and whether we are following biblical practises correctly.



Recently, I went grocery shopping. I am generally a frugal shopper and try to remember to pray before heading out. It was a simple prayer, "Lord, please bless me as I shop." And then I added, "In Jesus' name"<sup>6</sup> (because that is where the power is).

I had about twenty items on my shopping list. As I went from product to product, each with its 'SPECIAL!' label above it, after the first few, it felt as though the King of the Universe was chuckling and messing with my brain. *Every* item on my list was on sale. The last item on my list was avocados. The display had bags piled high, each

---

<sup>5</sup> [mos.org/leonardo/activities/mirror-writing.html](http://mos.org/leonardo/activities/mirror-writing.html)

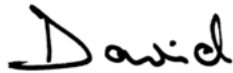
<sup>6</sup> What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? It means to ask according to His will and authority, so we can't just ask for a Cadillac or to win the lottery, but what His will is, which is often very different from ours.

bag with five perfectly ripe avocados; the only problem was there was no price on the display. What should I do? There was only one thing I could do, and, in faith, I placed the avocados in my cart. It was the last item to be rung through by the cashier. I watched with bated breath as the price was displayed. The receipt says, “Avocado, bag, \$3.44, Saving \$2.55”.

God was chuckling, and I was thriving!

It’s a small illustration, but it reflects a broader truth: God cares for us in both big and little ways, inviting us to thrive through faith and trust in His provision.

If you are genuinely interested in pursuing a thriving church life, I highly recommend adding these three books to your reading list. First, *THE BODY*<sup>7</sup> by Charles Colson, a book I encountered over twenty years ago and continue to revisit occasionally. Second, *ANATOMY OF A REVIVED CHURCH*<sup>8</sup> by Thom S. Rainer, and third, *RESURRECTING RELIGION*<sup>9</sup> by Greg Paul. I read the latter two during the final stages of putting this book together, and they only reinforced my conclusion: many churches *willfully* avoid thriving. It is my earnest prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this book to transform your, and your church’s, paradigm.



In the perpetual wonder of grace,

P.S. Some of the chapters include lists or significant questions, especially “Do you...?” questions, with checkboxes, ☐. *Please* make use of them. Jesus asked, “Do you...?” numerous times.

---

<sup>7</sup> ISBN 978-0849908668

<sup>8</sup> ISBN 978-1469477866

<sup>9</sup> ISBN 978-1631466663