



## ECONOMIC FREEDOM AND THE PATH TO FLOURISHING

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*“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,  
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;  
planted in the house of the LORD,  
they will flourish in the courts of our God.”  
Psalm 92:12-13*

The concept of shalom appears throughout the Bible. It describes the way things were before the Fall and it is the way things will be after Christ returns. Christians are to work toward the Christ’s restoration of this fallen world, and this involves striving toward flourishing for themselves and others as they live their lives. There is a strong correlation between economic freedom and human flourishing, showing Christians how economic wellbeing can help them achieve flourishing at all levels.

### THE PATH TO FLOURISHING

In the Old Testament, the concept of flourishing is best described by the Jewish word *shalom*. Biblical scholars note that shalom signifies a number of things, including salvation, wholeness, integrity, soundness, community, connectedness, righteousness, justice, and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Shalom denotes a right relationship with God, with others, and with God's good creation. It is the way God intended things to be when he created the universe.

Most English Bibles translate shalom as "peace," but it means much more than just an absence of conflict. The idea of flourishing as shalom in the widest sense of the word is a significant theme in the Old Testament:

- When the Lord brings shalom, there is prosperity.<sup>2</sup>
- There is health.<sup>3</sup>
- There is reconciliation.<sup>4</sup>
- There is contentment.<sup>5</sup>
- When the shalom of the Lord is present, there are good relationships between the nations and peoples.<sup>6</sup> God's shalom has a social as well as a personal dimension.

Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. It is the way things ought to be. The Old Testament prophets pictured shalom as the wolf living with the lamb, weapons turned into farming tools, deserts blooming, and the mountains streaming with red wine.<sup>7</sup>

The Bible reveals that full shalom awaits God's people at the end of this age, in the last chapter of redemptive history when Christ returns to consummate his kingdom.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, Christians are called to work toward shalom while they await the return of Christ. This working towards shalom can be described as flourishing. Social psychologist Barbara Frederickson describes this concept of flourishing in her book *Positivity*:

*People who flourish function at extraordinarily high levels – both psychologically and socially. They're not simply people who feel good. Flourishing goes beyond happiness, or satisfaction with life. Beyond feeling good, they're also doing good... People who flourish are highly engaged with their families, work, and communities. They're driven by a sense of purpose: they know why they get up in the morning.<sup>9</sup>*

This idea of flourishing goes beyond just physical well-being. People flourish when their lives have meaning and purpose. They flourish when they routinely experience optimism, hope, and gratitude. They flourish when they make a positive impact on others through their work.

This meaning of flourishing stems from the awareness that the lives of individuals are part of the larger story told in the Bible. Finding their place in this narrative helps them to realize that they are connected to creation and humanity in fundamental ways that allow them to truly understand their purpose and calling.

When we honor God, serve the common good, and further the kingdom of God through our work, we enable flourishing. God wants his people to flourish in this present age, so that they might offer those around us a picture of the way things could be.