

You can do more than survive

By [Elizabeth Hagan](#)

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There's a popular misconception when it comes to advice we give and crave during difficult times: *"You'll get through this. You can do it!"* *"If I can survive this. . . . I can do anything."*

In life's hard places, we rally ourselves around images of strength and courage. One of my personal favorites is the image pictured to the left. *I mean, who isn't inspired by Rosie?*

And it is true: sometimes we need to just bear down and get through life. Something this is all we have the energy for. We live to see another day. (And this is good!) But is this the summation of life? Survival?

Consider this alternative: life is not something we conquer. Life is not something we accomplish by checking off boxes at different stages. Life is about living into abundance.

My faith tradition calls to mind the words of Jesus who said in John's gospel, "I have come that [we] might have life and that [we] might have it more abundantly."

Life is about abundance.

But now that I've said this, I bet several of you might be wondering if I've now gone off the deep end of a gospel of prosperity. Just become a better person and you'll have more . . . Gag. No. None of that Joel Osteen nonsense.

But this: the deep suffering of our lives illuminates a path to abundance. For as we walk conscientiously through life not with an "I can't wait till this is over" but rather with a "What can I learn from this experience?" attitude, we change.

A couple of years ago, I found myself in one pretty difficult season. I was

- [unable to be paid or credited for the work I completed.](#)
- forced to undergo [emergency surgery that led to post surgical complications.](#)
- living in a place where I had only one friend other than my husband.
- watching a dear friend in a far away place face life-threatening harassment situation.

And the list could go on.

I have to admit in moments of August 2013, "survival" was often at the tip of my tongue. (And some whining too). I couldn't wait for this and that to get better and life to return to "normal."

But let me tell you what I learned: **There was no normal. And I would not return to it.**

Instead, I could be re-made. I could see the world and my vocation differently. I could claim life as good even when it wasn't from all outside appearances. I could gaze upon God in places full of such unexpected joy.

I bore new scars, yes. I could tell new stories of horrors, yes. And, I would probably always move through life with deeper caution, yes.

But then these words came out of my mouth: "This is abundant life. And I'm living it." (*And they were actually true!*)

As I look back on all the terrors of that summer and where I stand today, I can honestly say I am grateful. I'm grateful not just because I survived. Or I passed the test. Or because my body healed. Or however you want to describe it.

I am grateful because this difficult time gave me eyes to see my abundance. My heart softened toward those who faced unexpected illnesses. My vocation found clarity and re-definition in ways that felt more like me all along. My soul could hang on to the good when it showed up at my door, no matter if it came from one person or a hundred.

It birthed in me surrender to situations outside of my control, especially those thousands of miles away. Now, I can't wait to see what gift of abundance come next through all the ups and downs of my newest life chapter.

This is what I know: you and I are living in a human community of rich provisions. Let's stop just making it to another day. Or checking the hard stuff off our list. Such survival will get us nowhere interesting.

Let's claim the good and thrive! Let's live in this hard but beautiful world God has given us. There are so many wonders to behold.

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