

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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★Write down one new insight you received today...

★Thinking...

- How does Jesus reveal the Invisible God to you?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus holds all things together?
- How might your difficulties seem different knowing Jesus goes before you in all things?
- How does knowing Jesus's bloody cross was the only way to demonstrate the extent of His love for you change you?

★Applying...

- Consider your friends, family, and neighbors...list a few ways FlagNaz can be more attractive, welcoming, and comfortable *in their eyes*.
- Decide which one of these would most likely cause them to enjoy visiting us.
- Talk with others in the congregation about how to implement the change.

★Praying...

- Pray for eyes to see FlagNaz as your unwell friends, family, and neighbors do.
- Pray that God gives you a heart that chooses to sacrifice your interests in favor of a specific person's in your life.

FlagNaz

Be Healed and Thrive

August 14th, 2022

The Thriving Church Part 3 – Christ Crucified

Colossians 1:15-20 – He is the image of the Invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and Invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

I) **God Revealed...**

Many, perhaps all, explore the Two Big Questions of life: Who is God, and What does He have to do with me? These can be phrased differently, such as Why am I here and How am I supposed to live? These resolve into the same answers approached from different points of view. If you take these seriously, the answers will change your life. If we do so collectively as the Church, it will transform us into the *Thriving Church* we are called to be.

♦**The Invisible God**: Those asking these questions recognize a universal Truth at some level of their being – there is an unseen Force among us. The Athenians worshiped this as the unseen god (Acts 17:23). We see this today in the proliferation of religions and spiritual beliefs. Not only is it the most reasonable answer to the first question, it is the only one that leads to meaning in life. The Bible affirms this Truth in describing Jesus as “the image of the Invisible God (Col 1:15).”

♦**Revealed in His Son**: The invisibility of God is a complete mystery to humanity. Beyond our mortal senses we know nothing of Him. God knows this is not good for us, that we will wander lost all our days without knowing Him. “God was pleased to dwell (v19),” among us to reveal Himself to us for

our good, begetting Jesus as the perfect image of His Invisible Father (v15). The answer to Who is God is found only in Jesus. Every other answer is incomplete at best.

II) The Creative Act...

Jesus perfectly and completely answers the question Who is God, which requires us to examine Jesus to receive the answer. His works that reveal the Invisible God predate His Incarnation...they begin before time.

◆**The creative God:** The Two Big Questions implicitly ask another, How did I come to be? A *Creative* God begins to address the issue of life's purpose. Random chance or a divine accident by indifferent gods makes life absurd. Meaningless. What's the point? *Thriving Christians* are hopeful, joyful people because we know the Invisible God designed the universe, begetting His Son as "the firstborn of all creation (v15)." Father God is the creative visionary, the architect of all that exists.

◆**The creative agent:** The Invisible God who transcends time and space spoke all things into existence (Gen 1:3-26). Such an act leaves space for a distant god, one unwilling or incapable of penetrating our material world. One who starts all things only to recline and watch what happens. God reveals Himself as One far greater, breathing life into *Creation* by His Word, Jesus, through whom "all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible (Col 1:16)." That means He made you, me, everyone in this room, including our invisible inner being.

III) His Relation to Us...

We have answered in part God's relation to us – He *Created* us. The method of *Creation* suggests a grander relationship full of meaning. Jesus is the *substance* of *Creation*, remaining with us in all ways at all times. God's relation to us is timeless, eternal. This suggests an intimate, purposeful relationship that makes life meaningful.

◆**He is our Shepherd:** Our awareness of the Invisible God comes from His nearness. This nearness is the presence of Jesus. He did not create the world to sit back and watch it. "All things have been created through him and for him...and in him all things hold together (v16-17)." Nearness does not capture the reality, that He is in us and we in Him. He "is before all things (v17)," and has "come to have first place in everything (v18)." Going before us, Jesus shepherds all creation toward His purposes. He relates to us by sustaining and leading us.

◆**He is our Head:** These dimensions of our relationship with the Living God would be enough if our individual relationship with God fulfilled His purpose. It doesn't. Having *Created* all things individually, He then *Creates* the Church with each of us as members. He does so as "head of the body, the church (v18)." As Head, Jesus grants all wisdom, guiding us into God's will, the fullness of His purpose for us. Our purpose is to bring Him all glory, which is

revealed as we express His image to all *Creation* as the visible Body. The Church is His vessel of Love on earth.

IV) God's Perfect Love...

Who is God? The *Creator* and *Sustainer* of all things. The *Shepherd* of humanity. Everything *Revealed* in the person of Jesus Christ. What does He have to do with us? Our design, purpose, and existence are caused by Him. He goes before us. He forged us into His Church, a unified community of His followers. These alone form a passive *Love*, one that waits for us to come take it. Here is the crucial answer to our Two Big Questions.

◆**What are you willing to do?:** There are many hurting people so overwhelmed they cannot sense God's *Love*. It seems He does not care enough to act, so whatever *Love* He has is useless. Passive. Irrelevant and excluded from them. These discard this distant god in search of real help. Many, many others are suffering or sleeping through life. They sense God's *Love* in a meager way. Like welfare, enough to barely get by. Eventually, if that's all there is, these start exploring other sources of *Love* wishing for more. This is a form of active *Love*, which serves another after serving the self. Neither of these are the fullness of God's *Love*. The fullness of God's *Love* is *Sacrificial*, serving the other first, the self last. Jesus, in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (v19)," expressed the perfection of *Sacrificial Love* by "making peace through the blood of his cross (v20)." Not theoretical *Love*, weak *Love*, partial *Love*, but the costliest *Love* God could express. He withheld nothing from us. We can *Trust* Him because He has already proved His limitless *Love* for us.

◆**State of Love and Trust:** God is our *Creator* who chooses us, freely offers everything good to us who accept His *Love*. We are the object and intended image of His *Love*. We are to live out our receipt of His *Love* by *Trusting* Him enough to follow Him in all ways. We do so as ones "God was pleased to reconcile to himself (v19)." These dwell in peace with God. The cross expresses and confirms this. The complete answer to Who is God is He is the One who *Creates, Sustains, Restores, and Lovingly Leads us into Thriving Life*. He relates to us in one of two ways – Our *Loving* God who we follow or the One we reject.

◆**Thriving through Sacrifice:** Christians, want to *Thrive*? Follow Jesus, who has gone before you to lead you. Do not *Love* passively, do not *Love* yourself first, *Love* your friends, family, and neighbors with your very best. You may ask, I might have nothing left after them, how is that *Thriving*? Jesus promises us joy in His words and deeds. He celebrated, enjoyed parties, attracted huge crowds – what miser attracts crowds? We imagine His smile and laughter as people were healed. God conforms our hearts and minds to rejoice as we *Love* others. Parents and grandparents have lived experience in this. What would they not *Sacrifice* in *Love* of their children?