

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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

★Thinking...

- Who were those from whom you sought approval? In what ways was this quest unsatisfying?
- What does it mean to you to separate loving someone from seeking their approval?
- How do you validate day to day that God is pleased with you?

★Applying...

- List one or two people whose approval you have been seeking.
- Pray over what thoughts, words, and deeds would be loving toward them without seeking approval.
- Choose one or two of these that are different than your current behaviors and commit to them for one week.

★Praying...

- Father, does my being please you? How would you have me love others as an act pleasing to you?
- Father, sustain my heart with your approval as I suffer the disappointment and fear of others threatened that I no longer seek theirs.

Colossians 1:21-24 – And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a minister of this gospel. I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

I) When Do We Get to Thrive...?

Jesus asks us to trust Him enough to follow Him in sacrificial love toward another, pursuing their best at any cost. Let's get real. Many of us have tried this only to be disappointed, ridiculed, abandoned, burned. There has to be something about living as Thriving Christians we are missing...

◆ **The struggle is real:** A brutal reality in life is that we will *always* disappoint *someone*. The question, the one thing we can control, is who we will not try to satisfy. Early on, each of us chooses to please people. Many of us have failed...and failed and failed. Having disappointed God, we find it impossible to please those whose approval we sought. We don't live up to our parent's expectations. Fail in romantic relationships. Disappoint our teachers. Can't ever fully satisfy our bosses. Some of us even disgust ourselves. We are

trapped having estranged ourselves from God, being “hostile in mind...doing evil (Col 1:21)” in hopes of pleasing others. Thank God for the Hope we have in Jesus.

◆**Reorienting our hope:** We struggle because of our distorted orientation of hope. There is an innate need to be approved. God made us to receive His love and reflect it back to Him. By turning mirror toward sinful humanity in our attempt to “be like God (Gen 3:5),” we receive and reflect selfish longings of pride and desire. The Good News of Jesus is that He makes it possible to reorient our mirror toward God. He reconciled us, a way of saying He repaired our separation. He will “present [us] holy and blameless and irreproachable before [the Father] (Col 1:22).” Our mirror reoriented, we experience the Thriving Life of eternal hope, knowing our sincere intent to please God is effective through Jesus, the one with whom the Father is “well pleased (Lk 3:22).”

II) The Cost of Thriving...

Some of us continue struggling in life attempting to please God *and* please humans. We confuse the command to love others as a need to earn their approval. The Holy Spirit urges us to let go and overcome the struggle.

◆**Focus the mirror:** Our mirror’s lens is too wide. Sure, we receive God’s love. But we also pick up mixed signals from those around us. One cost of the Thriving Christian life is to “continue securely established and steadfast in the faith (v23).” Securely established, tightly anchored, fixed in position. We must focus tightly on Jesus presenting us “holy and blameless (v22).” Our faith becomes more secure the more we narrow the focus of our mirror’s lens to the love of Jesus.

◆**The danger of noise:** The next brutal reality is that by choosing to please God, we *will* disappoint the world. It won’t just be disappointed; it will be threatened and fearful. It will lash out at us. Many will notice our disinterest in their approval. As we recuse ourselves from former behaviors no longer attractive, they will be offended. That we do not judge or speak out against them does not insulate us from these reactions. Our contentment inflames inner knowledge that worldly ways are unsatisfying. This threat to their worldview will cause them to attempt to shift us “from the hope promised by the gospel (v23).” Thriving Christians learn to disregard the noise, focusing entirely on

the approval and love of the Father. Don’t worry, He will push us into new relationships infused with purpose.

III) The Path to Thriving...

Jesus has all power and authority on earth and in heaven. He paid the highest price possible for us. He would have removed us from the world and secured us in heaven if there was not a grand purpose in our remaining. The very purpose for which we remain is the path that will narrow our lens and focus our mirror on His love.

◆**The purpose of our hope:** We are told that Christ *has* reconciled us (past), if we *continue* in our faith (present), and that “the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (v23, future).” Our purpose is intertwined with this declaration in that we have received this gospel that will be proclaimed to every creature under heaven. This purpose suggests that disconnecting from those we disappoint opens space for those with whom we are intended to share the Good News and Thriving Life (Mt 28:19-20).

◆**Thriving is servitude:** Jesus infuses us with a desire to reflect His love onto others. This is not the former distorted orientation that receives and reflects selfish longings. This is God-aimed reflection of His love toward those He wishes to share in our hope with us. This is love demanding action. Action taking time and energy. Resources that used to be spent on those worldly, unsatisfying longings. Not all sinful longings per se, just old unproductive ways. As we abandon the struggle, giving up the old ways, we experience a third brutal reality. Even those not offended are unlikely to follow us into our new ways of servitude. We find ourselves laser focused on the love of God as we become servants “of this gospel (Col 1:23).”

IV) Thriving Christians Need a Thriving Church...

God is relational, never alone, existing always as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Likewise, Jesus rescued us into His Church. The Holy Spirit reorients our hope such that we “rejoice in [our] sufferings (v24)” because we no longer hold our hope in the worldly longings sacrificed for the sake of building the Church. Few will persist going it alone. Most will shift their hope back toward old ways just to escape the loneliness of solitary existence. We need bonds with one another in the united body to support our individual Christian faith. This is the purpose and the path to Thriving. Thriving together we are securely established and steadfast in the faith. We won’t shift from our hope in the Gospel, the hope of eternity pleasing God and Thriving together.