

# ***Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life***

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

★Thinking...

- What *fashion statements* did my life make before Jesus?
- What *fashion statement* am I making in how I live now?
- In what ways is my lifestyle fashion clashing between who I *aspire* to be and my *outward expressions*?

★Applying...

- Think about one significant thought or feeling that is not of Jesus that causes words or actions that clash with Jesus's uniform.
- Reflect on what thought or feeling comes from Jesus that leads to behavior fitting the uniform.
- Commit to taking off this form of the *old self* and putting on the *new self* to the best of your ability through the Holy Spirit.

★Praying...

- Father, reveal to me one way I am wearing the *old self* and how you would have me dress differently.
- Please give me the power of Your Spirit to live differently, beginning with how I think and feel, leading to how I speak and act.

**Col 3:1-3, 9-11** – So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God...seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

## **I) Fashion's Purpose...**

How do you think about clothes? Are they how you show your mood or an idea? Do they make a statement? If so, what statement do they make? There is a certain kind of clothing that definitively declares who we are – uniforms. Once we put on a uniform, we are *one of them*. The Bible is putting us to a decision today – will we wear the uniform? ♦**Clothes tell our story:** Have you changed styles over your life? Many of us can chart phases of life by the clothes we wore. Teenage years marked by rebellion, studiousness, or athleticism. Early working years in shop clothes, ranch shirts, or suits. Leisurewear for around the house, going out, or *really* going out(doors). Each of these signaled something about what we believed in, and who we wanted to be. Scripture asks, “if you have been raised with Christ (Col 3:1),” will you now clothe yourself as one of His? It is time to leave behind the old phase and pursue the new one.

◆**Clothes make the man:** There is a reason we can trace phases of life in fashion. What we wear reflects, and shapes, what we think and feel. What we think and feel directs what we say and do. It is amazing how putting on the dress uniform draws out formality. Knowing this, God directs us to set our “minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (3:2),” and clothe ourselves “with the new self (3:10).” One leads to the other. When we are clothed inappropriately for an occasion, we must constantly fight the impulse to think, feel, speak, and act inappropriately, too. Eventually, we will weary, giving into the natural impulses. If we do not put on the uniform, we are likely to be part-time followers of Jesus at best.

## II) Fashion’s Effect...

Clothes are visible, an *outward expression* of our inward being. They inform and remind us of who we *aspire* to be. They declare the same to the people we encounter in life. A young woman’s father likely reacts differently to the same young man depending on his style of dress when arriving for a date. The question Jesus poses, will we wear His uniform, is weightier than we might think.

◆**Dress the part:** There is a relationship between who we *aspire* to be, who we *are*, and how we express ourselves. The world suggests we are pretenders if we dress in the manner of one we *aspire* to be. The Bible tells us the opposite. While we yet “seek the things that are above (3:1)...” and are “being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the creator (3:10),” we already “have died (3:3)...” and “have stripped off the old self with its practices (3:9).” We have died to the world, abandoned it and its ways, as we *aspire* to be Christlike. The relationship, then, is that we *are* in the making of who we *aspire* to be and commit ourselves to this purpose in our *outward expressions*.

◆**Leave something to the imagination:** What attracts you to someone else? Their wealth, power, prestige? Or is it the person, their character, charisma, purpose? While some are attracted by the former, most eventually give into the Truth, finding attraction in the latter. Wearing Jesus’s uniform, we present ourselves attractive to those who, conscious or not, “seek the things that are above (3:1).” We are unlike the masses, unconcerned with “things that are on earth (3:2),” having “Put to death...whatever in [us] is earthly (3:5),” and rid ourselves of “all such things – anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language (3:8).” Our inner “life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3).” We are mysterious to others because our inner passions are hidden to those whose eyes are not yet opened to spiritual realities.

The mystery is attractive, and this attractiveness, which is found in the uniform of Jesus, opens the eyes of others so that “Christ who is [our] life is revealed...in glory (3:4).”

## III) Fashion Statements...

Clothes are comfortable expressions of ourselves in part because they are impermanent. As we change, they change. Uniforms, particularly those imparted to us by authority, less so. Some represent permanent membership and allegiance. Not just permanent – pervasive. A supreme court justice is *always* and in *every way* a justice, even when dining with friends without the robe. Jesus is so gentle, kind, humble, perhaps we miss the extremity of His invitation.

◆**Always on:** There are people we either love or hate to be around simply because they are one-track minded. Always dressed for, thinking and talking about their *one thing*. Bring up Beyonce’s new album with an entrepreneur, likely the conversation will bend to how it was released, its sales trend, her business savvy. *I wanted to talk about the music!* This is the maniacal focus which we as *Thriving* followers of Jesus are to live. The Christian life is not an extension of “whatever in [us] is earthly (3:5)...the old self with its practices (3:9).” That life is over, “for [we] have died (3:3),” having “Put [it] to death (3:5).” Instead, we have chosen a life “hidden with Christ in God (3:3),” in which “Christ is all and in all (3:11)!” The uniform of *Thriving Christians* is the full character of Jesus that sees the world exclusively through His eyes. *Thriving Christians* are not world-plus people. The “new self” that reflects “the image of its creator (3:10),” is revealed in how we relate to other people – *all* of them.

◆**Clear allegiance:** We dress for our audience. We want to delight those like us, signaling our similarities. If we are brutally honest, we often want to offend, intimidate, repel those unlike us in this *outward expression*. Jesus’s uniform is wholly different. It is designed to destroy the barriers of difference, encouraging those like us and attracting those unlike us. Its purpose is that “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free (3:11).” Jesus’s uniform of the love of God is never out of fashion, misfit to the occasion. To be *Thriving Christians*, we can no longer seek the satisfaction of delighting some while offending others. The Word does not read Christ is us and in us... it reads “Christ is *all* and in *all* (3:11).” Jesus and His invitation to follow Him are so extreme, so radical, He expects us to see Him in everyone else and to live up to the uniform.