

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

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

★Thinking...

- What results from loving someone the wrong way? For example, making a meal from ingredients the other cannot stand...
- How have you learned the effects of various behaviors as you express love to others?
- Have you tried adapting your recipe for loving various people?
- How have you been influenced to “submit to regulations” rather than love others most effectively?

★Applying...

- Consider an important relationship that you wish to strengthen.
- List ways you have tried loving that person that have not produced the results you expected.
- Consider how you might adapt your recipe of loving behavior to get a better response.
- Try it and note the change in response. Better or worse? Adapt again as needed.

★Praying...

- Father, who have I been loving ineffectively? How would you have me behave toward them to best express your love?
- Father, remind me that you desire great meals, not dutifully followed recipes. Help me understand the ways to love people in new situations today.

**Colossians 2:13-15, 20** – And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it... If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations...

## **I) Do You Cook – Really Cook...?**

Those of us who prepare food know there is a difference between making a meal and really cooking. Opening a frozen lasagna or a box of macaroni and cheese is not cooking. Sorry. It's surviving...sort of. This is the sad reality for the many. No time or ability to cook, but dinner must be served nightly. Life is the same way. Except, what we think of as base survival is a dead end resulting in despair and death. Until Jesus arrives, offering to show us how to really cook. Once we taste His meals, we won't ever go back to tasteless packaged meals.

♦**It's intimidating:** Cooking can be intimidating. Teaspoons, tablespoons, cups, quarts... Dicing, slicing, mincing... how hot is too hot? Baking powder or soda? All of us who cook have destroyed a meal or two by measuring inaccurately, skipping the wrong ingredient, letting the oven go too long. Life is this way, too. All of us have ruined a day, a relationship, a situation. Unlike cooks, we were born to live.

That destroyed meal of life disqualifies us for our purpose. Praise God, He sent His Son Jesus to forgive us these sins “when [we] were dead in trespasses,” and restore us to life “together with him (Col 2:13).” He does not renew our lives to again prepare a miserable meal. He comes alongside us, showing us how to create something delicious.

◆**I’m not eating here again:** Have you ever embarrassed yourself by making something awful for others who know how to cook? It can be the final time you are asked to provide the main dish. From now on, please bring the drinks or a salad. Jesus knows we ruined previous meals. He sees our potential. He erases “the record that stood against us with its legal demands (2:14).” He went further than that, setting it “aside, nailing it to the cross (ibid).” He realizes what we need is a master to show us how to translate the recipe, God’s Word, into the Thriving Christian Life.

## II) How Much is a Pinch...?

We live in a great time for those who like to cook. Global ingredients are in a store near us, probably year-round. Infinite recipes are at our fingertips thanks to the internet. As are cooking shows and online videos to see the technique that makes the dish sizzle. The last generation was largely stuck with their cookbooks and on-the-box recipes. For many, deviating from the recipe was certain disaster. Proper cooking was following the rules – precisely! Jesus knows great cooking is part science, part art. He changes the rules by which we Thrive at life.

◆**Grandma’s pie:** Some of us have the treasured family recipe for a complex meal like chili, or delicate baked goods like a proper pastry. Maybe we were fortunate enough to have grandma or grandpa show us how to prepare the recipe. Experience suggests that they were particular, everything needing to be just so. This is like life under the Law. It doesn’t matter *what* Law, any Law is a combination of a general rule and a specific way of interpreting it. Some rules, such as Do Not Murder, are simple to understand. Or, are they? What about an accident? What about a desire to harm but not kill? Take the Sabbath, for instance. What does it mean to “keep it holy...[and] not do any work (Ex 20:8-10)?” Over generations, leaders developed interpretations that became synonymous with the rule itself. Jesus brings us back to the heart of Thriving Life, and cooking. He “disarmed the rulers and authorities...triumphing over them (Col 2:15).” He sought God’s purpose and meaning in the Laws, applying them variously as each

situation required to live the perfect godly life. By so doing, He offended the “rulers and authorities.” When God raised Jesus from the dead and sat Jesus at His right hand (Ps 110:1, Mark 16:19, Acts 2:33), He demonstrated His pleasure in Jesus above those who followed the rules into an awful meal. He knows when a teaspoon means a heaping spoonful, when a pinch is a little or a lot, and when to leave the cake in the oven ten minutes longer than written in the recipe. The goal is not to follow a set of instructions, it is to bake the perfect cake for the party.

## III) What is a Great Meal...?

The question confronting those of us wanting to Thrive is whether we consider that obedience to recipe or sharing the perfect meal. There are certain principles needed for a meal to be perfect – appetizers while people gather and mingle, complementary mains and sides, great flavors and textures. There is infinite diversity in how to apply these. No wonder dinner parties are never out of fashion! The Holy Spirit challenges us to Follow Jesus and be a great cook by adapting the principles to each occasion.

◆**How much sugar?** Those of us who rebelled and experimented with that famous family recipe discover something. We learned how to adapt the textures and flavors. Not all discovery delivered a delicious meal, but we learned in each case. When we have a guest who prefers tart to sweet, we know how much sugar can be replaced with a bit of lime zest. The quality of the meal is *subjective*, and we serve our guests with love. Jesus asks, “Why do you live as if you still belonged to the world (Col 2:20)?” If we know our guest wants the tarter cake, make the tarter cake! God wants us to obey Him by loving others, not stick to the rules knowing it will be misery for our guests.

◆**Cater to the guests:** The secret to great cooking is to know the principles, know ingredients, know the kitchen, and *know the guests*. No great Italian restaurant serves tacos. Their customers do not *want* tacos. When we cook for our friends, family, and neighbors, do we prepare meals too spicy, bland, meaty, vegetarian, for their tastes? Not if we want to continue hosting excellent parties. We serve food our guests will *love*. “Why do [we] submit to regulations (2:20)?” If we ultimately want to live a life pleasing to God, which is one that attracts others to Him by expressing His love for them, we must adapt our behavior to represent Jesus to the needs and desires of others. Adapting to what others need requires two things of Thriving Christians: Know the other and listen to the Holy Spirit.