

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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

★Thinking...

- What might it cost me to recklessly love others by giving of myself?
- What are the specific sources God might use to provide for me if I emptied myself?
- What is holding you back from relocating to the Garden for a better future?

★Applying...

- Identify someone in your circle of influence who suffers hunger and thirst.
- List provisions God has given you for the purpose of satisfying that person. (Note: these may be material or relational)
- Wipe that person's tears, sharing God's provisions and inviting to join you at the harvest feast in the Garden.

★Praying...

- Father, please help me abandon failed ways that do not lead to abundance for all. Break my heart for the poor and needy, revealing those with whom you intend me to share as your hands and feet.
- Father, increase my faith that you will fulfill your promise to me and give me all I need as I take the risk to love others recklessly.



A Christmas Feast for All

Isaiah 25:6-10 – On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

I) Hunger Pangs...

Hunger, thirst, responses to lack of life's most basic needs. They begin as minor annoyances that grow, grow until they overwhelm our being until we do not feel them; we *are* hunger and thirst. Living in darkness, we are taught that life's purpose is to defeat hunger and thirst. Secure today's provision. Maybe tomorrow's. Store enough for the rest of our days. This way of life has winners and losers, the content and the miserable. The Bible assures those seeking His Light that God's ways are higher than this (Isa 55:9).

♦ **There is enough to go round**: The history of civilization is an ongoing experiment attempting to discover a way to establish material justice. Everyone works, everyone eats. The ongoing experiment is thus far failed. Hunger and its resulting terrors persist. All the while God is offering the solution, His "plans formed of old, faithful and sure

November 27th, 2022

(Isa 25:1).” We exhaust ourselves pursuing our own solution before humbling ourselves to accept God’s way. However long it takes, God will make our city a heap, “the fortified city a ruin (v2).” We have seen it on scales large and small throughout all time. Thankfully, we have also always seen His care for us.

♦**Supply chain problems:** The experiment leads to a thorny problem – what about those who cannot *earn* their food? Orphanages, poor houses, the projects, food pantries. These are not modern solutions, however good we feel about them. Such have been around in some form since biblical times. God’s concern for widows and orphans is evident throughout His Word. Manna in the wilderness, gleaning the fields in the Promised Land, Boaz and Ruth, Elisha and the widow, Paul’s collection for the economically oppressed Jerusalem church. God ordained compassion in His Law, stirs the hearts of all people enough that no matter how wicked a nation there has always been “a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress (v4).” He has never abandoned the poor, yet this weak shadow of provision is the “disgrace of his people (v8).” His heart breaks as we fail to pursue His way, the way of abundance for all.

II) Too Hungry to Think...

It is grueling to think of anything but extreme hunger and thirst. To act wisely. We eat or drink nearly anything if hungry and thirsty enough. Memories of such despair drive us to do anything to avoid future deprivation. This is life in polar climates far from God’s Garden. The invitation to follow Jesus, return to the Light, join Him in the Garden on His mountain with the security of communal abundance.

♦**Location, location, location:** The cycle of planting, tending, harvesting, following take different shapes depending on one’s location. Environs with extreme winters have shorter growing seasons. One must work hard as summer ends to store up provisions for the long winter. Following Jesus into Spiritual Paradise promises “endless peace...with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore (9:7).” This is possible because “the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food (25:6).” If we want to enjoy this feast, we cannot neglect the condition of location – “On this mountain... (v6).” “For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain (v10).” The “salvation” for which we will “be glad and rejoice (v9),” is received as we relocate.

♦**Willing to move:** Many of us relocate for the promise of economic security. Job opportunities, whether those anticipated or already

offered, are the reason for some moves. Some for locations with a lower cost of living. We leave behind homes as we leave behind the struggle against hunger. Jesus offers us a “feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines (v6),” as a reason to make the move. We now have promises of peace, justice, righteousness, *and* economic security. A land without violence, oppression, and hunger. Not for the elite, either. He offers this to “all peoples (v6-7),” to “wipe away the tears from all faces (v8).” The solution humanity has sought for all time. But how?

III) A Meal That Satisfies...

Benevolent kings and dictators. Free market competition. Central plans. Democracies. Authoritarian rule. None of these has delivered the promised solution. The experiment continues and we suffer as a result. God offers His ways with the promise of peace, justice, and abundance on the condition that we follow Jesus into Spiritual Paradise, choosing to live in the Light daily. Jesus is “the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6),” the promised one whose “authority shall grow continually (Isa 9:7).” If we want to know the solution, we must know Jesus.

♦**Gordian knot:** It is amazing that humanity has not solved the problem of hunger and thirst for all. Billions of people have worked at it for thousands of years. It seems an impossible situation. No matter how hard we try, we are always in the dark without the intervention of God. It takes Him to “destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples (25:7).” All peoples for all time have “waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited (v9).” There simply is no one else with the knowledge and ability to return to the Promised Land. He is “the way.”

♦**You first:** Jesus’s way is one of reckless love for others. He wiped away the tears of others through His compassion and acts of mercy. Returning to the Garden requires you and I to do likewise. As His hands and feet, it is through us “the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces (v8).” This lifestyle flows eternally from beings (re)made in His image, those He calls His people. As the Spirit of God enables us to live this way, “the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth (v8),” revealing God’s truth in us. That truth is God will provide for us, so we can live fully for each other. As we follow His way, revealing His truth, we enjoy His life as Jesus swallows “up death forever (v8).” This Christmas, drop everything to follow Jesus to take your seat at his harvest feast.