

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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

★Thinking...

- In what ways are you being complacent in your spiritual life?
- What are examples of the “thorns and briars” growing in your wilderness as a result?
- What would letting the ox and donkey range free look like for you?

★Applying...

- Identify one specific dimension of life in which you are being complacent.
- Commit to work that Land each day this week in prayer, reflective reading, discussion with another Christian.
- Take note of the fruit you bear as a result of this work.

★Praying...

- Father, pour out your Spirit from on high and transform what remains of my wilderness into fruitful fields.
- Bring my attention to areas of my life I am not tending so I may pull the weeds and restore the vines.



Wasteland Reclaimed

Isaiah 32:15-20 – until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. The forest will disappear completely, and the city will be utterly laid low. Happy will you be who sow beside every stream, who let the ox and the donkey range freely.

I) Complacency Breeds Contempt...

In the busyness of life, we learn the things that can be handled as time permits and the things that require constant attention. Laundry, get it done when you can. Listening to our children, do it when they offer themselves. Gardening, farming, working land, these cannot be put off with any hope of a bountiful harvest. How easily we forget that our most basic needs are met by productive Land.

♦**A full-time job**: Some have tried their hand gardening or small-scale farming. Quickly they discover the complexity. Getting the watering schedule wrong, mistiming the planting, neglecting the weeds, any number of small mistakes and the crop fails. Gardening as a hobby, a secondary activity to the rest of our busy lives, is difficult to do well. When humanity exited God’s presence and His Garden, we took responsibility to work a difficult Land and began neglecting it. He tells us to “shudder, you complacent ones (Isa 32:11),” because

“the hill and the watchtower will become [wastelands] forever (v14).” Complacency has impoverished our Land.

◆**It’s dangerous out there:** Those living in the American Southwest understand Wasteland. Surrounded by desert, we know barren expanses with little sustenance. We also know the darker truth about Wastelands – lacking *helpfulness*, they abound in *harmfulness*. The soil is found “growing up in thorns and briars...the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks (v13-14).” Thorns, thistles, cacti, snakes, scorpions. Many a lackadaisical hiker has had to painfully remove needles from a wound. Distracted, complacent, our environment has decayed into unproductive, threatening territory from which there is no escape.

II) Tools for the Job...

Farmers know good land when they find it. Land with plenty of water, rich soil, level plains for acres of crops. Few arrived in the American Southwest and thought it the Promised Land of abundant produce. Yet, a large portion of food crops are now produced in what was Wasteland. Thought “Wasteland forever” until new tools and methods were discovered.

◆**One’s trash is another’s treasure:** Some Land is so rocky and overgrown with “thorns and briars” it seems impossible to convert it to “pleasant fields (v12).” That is, not if one only has a hoe to do the job. The advantage of industrial farms is access to the tools and methods to convert Land and get the most out of it. Massive tractors, sophisticated soil supplements, irrigation systems. Political influence to divert water from faraway. While you and I have no influence over the “spring of water gushing up to eternal life (John 4:14),” Jesus does. He is the “true vine” supplied by this spring and tended by “the vinegrower (John 15:1).” The Father, who is the vinegrower, “removes every branch in [Jesus] that bears no fruit. (v2).” Despite our Land having decayed into a “Wasteland forever” due to our inability, through Jesus it “becomes a fruitful field (Isa 32:15).” He has spiritual resources which none of us possess.

◆**Willing to relocate:** Converting wilderness into fruitful fields is only the first step. The Land became wilderness by distraction and complacency. It must be worked continually. Farmers claiming Land are committing themselves to the place and the task. God has invited us to follow Jesus from our harsh location up His mountain to enjoy a rich feast. He intends “justice to dwell...and righteousness [to] abide in the fruitful field...and the result of righteousness, quietness and

trust forever (v16-17).” This is not a holiday. It is permanent relocation to where we “sow beside every stream (v20),” and He fulfills the promise that “Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit (John 15:2).” It is a wholesale change of our lives.

III) A Christmas Abode...

The promise of Christmas is two-fold. We receive the “son given to us (Isa 9:6),” our Savior. He is the one to lead us from our Wasteland into the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. This first part is the invitation to a *journey*. The second part, that the “spirit from on high is poured out on us (32:15),” is a call to *abide*. The promise of One equipping us to live well in the Land, without whom we will neglect any Land to decay into Wasteland.

◆**Free and clear:** The farming community is facing a new challenge today. Many farmer’s children are not picking up the family business. For the first time it is uncertain who will tend Land that previously has been passed down generations. The inheritance is no longer seen as blessing. The Holy Spirit will make life in the Land desirable. Not just economically productive, but a life in which “justice will dwell...and righteousness abide (v16).” Everyone producing to their ability, sharing with those in need, trading with others so nothing lacks. The idea of *abiding* is not a fleeting presence, but permanent residence in which the fullness of the Spirit’s righteousness works through us to tend the Land and sustain the community in every way. The kind of place none will want to leave.

◆**Still waters:** One reason given by farmer’s children for departing the Land is that the job is hard and unpredictable. Weather, cost of materials, disease all can bring calamity while financial burdens build up. Christmas stands alone as a promise not only for fertile Land, but assurance of “quietness and trust forever (v17).” “Happy will you be who sow beside every stream (v20),” because Jesus offers an eternal *abode* “in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places (v18).” Contrast this image with a time in which “the forest will disappear completely, and the city will be utterly laid low (v19).” His ways are higher than our ways. When we accept that it is “a spirit from on high” equipping us and assuring us of that “spring of water gushing up to eternal life,” we can give over control to Him. We discover happiness is not just sowing “beside every stream,” but letting “the ox and the donkey range free (v20).” This Christmas, accept the invitation to let go the distractions and focus exclusively on tending your fruitful field.