

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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

★Thinking...

- In what domain of life are you mistaking *more* for *nice*?
- How does the pursuit of *nice* interfere with your *being nice*?
- What might life be like if you could always *be nice*?

★Applying...

- Select a circumstance of life that controls your attitude.
- Identify what feeling is triggered by that circumstance – good or bad – and how you can replace it knowing God sees you as a *Nice* Person.
- Approach the day grounded in the reality God sees your inner being as *nice* and uncontrolled by that circumstance.

★Praying...

- Father, I choose to live in the Light of your Son Jesus. Thank you for revealing your inner heart to me through Him. Please help me to see myself and others the way you do. Let me be one of your righteous people that you planted so you may be glorified. Let me make you proud in my thoughts, words, and deeds today.



FLAGNAZ



Christmas Sunrise

Isaiah 60:17-22 – Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified. The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly.

I) Get Yourself Something *Nice*...

If we are honest with ourselves, we prefer *nice* things. Even the rugged prefer the quality versions of tools and gear. We like upgrades. Often, this works to our benefit. The *nicer* clothes improve our self-confidence. The more durable, sharper saw lasts longer and cuts straighter. Other times, not so much. The larger house takes more cleaning and upkeep. The luxury vehicle is expensive to maintain. God observed that His treasured people made poor choices

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in upgrading, mistaking avarice for wisdom. This Christmas, He offers us an opt-out that is a trade-up.

◆**Have an upgrade:** True upgrades are found in quality of material. Cozy sheets are densely threaded linens. Reliable saws are produced from great steel. Effective fly rods are made of bamboo. The result of each is an item that does what we want and need every time. God promises that if we seek Him as our source, all our basic materials will be upgraded. “Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver (Isa 60:17).” Bronze for wood, iron for stones. He encourages us to seek *nicer*.

◆**Quality over quantity:** Some perceive *more* as *nicer*. Another case of mistaken identity. *More* is *more*. *Nicer* is *nicer*. Many closets and garages are stuffed because of *more*. Now we are joylessly enslaved to our overflowing possessions. Christmas commemorates God removing our former masters of greed and lust to appoint “Peace as [our] overseer and Righteousness as [our] taskmaster (v17).” We use His *nicer* materials of “Salvation” and “Praise (v18)” to construct quality lives of peace reflecting God’s Light onto those in our lives for their benefit. As a result, we eradicate violence, devastation, and destruction from within (v18).

II) I Hope You Like It...

Many *nice* things arrive as gifts. For many of us, gifts are given as symbols. Symbols that we know another, care for them, love them. We desire to please our loved ones with gifts in hope they trust in our love. We use the seen to express the deeper truth of the unseen. Not only a deeper truth, a better truth. Parents understand this. All the toys we can give our children do not promote their welfare so much as our inner commitment to promote their best lives. God upgrades our seen materials as a way to point to the best He offers in His unseen.

◆**Let me explain:** Gifting is risky. We expose ourselves through the act. How we feel about someone, how well we know them, how much we are willing to sacrifice for them. Frustratingly, often the receiver misunderstands our intent and desire, letting the giver down. God uses His Word to teach us His intent and desire. He commands “the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of nations shall come to you (v5),” so that trusting Him we “shall call [our] walls Salvation, and [our] gates Praise (v18).” God tells us He is sending the bounty of nations, upgrading our materials, to awaken our senses to His unseen. Unseen, but not unknown.

◆**This year’s must-have gift:** Retailers prey on our need to symbolize impossibly grand feelings with gifts. They want us to give expensive jewelry and vehicles to suggest we love someone soooo much. If you give *this product*, the receiver will surely know your heart. Having awakened our senses to His unseen, He offers to provide a way to see it, saying “the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory...your days of mourning shall be ended (v19-20).” He wants to shift our gaze from the external to the internal, giving us the necessary X-ray vision.

III) A Nice Christmas...

We have toxic relationship with *nice* things. Long ago we decided we loved them more than God Himself. If we could only be surrounded by *nice* things, *nice* people, *nice* circumstances all the time, we would be our best selves. We enslaved ourselves to external circumstances and the relentless pursuit of *nice*, our feelings and thoughts tossed around by daily life. Having decided to love *nice* things more than their Maker, God chose to “shut [our] eyes...so that [we] may not look with [our] eyes...turn and be healed (6:10).” That is, until the advent of Jesus.

◆**Glimpse of the heart:** Many of us have experienced Christmas gone wrong. The *nice* gift is the wrong size, color, version. The *nice* meal is overcooked. Someone is allergic to the *nice* sauce. It is the fodder for many a comedy. Invariably, these conclude with a happy ending because the loved ones get a glimpse into the heart of the giver. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (John 3:16),” “in him was life, and the life was the light (1:4),” and “He said to them, ‘Come and see (1:39).’” God’s original Christmas gift is direct revelation of His heart, granted to us through the Light of His Son.

◆**He says I’m nice:** When we see the heart of God revealed in the Light of Jesus, we turn to be healed in the realization everything we ever wanted from *nice* things was to feel loved, valued, worthy. We want to be *nice* and presumed *nice* things make us so. The inner reality is we “are the shoot that [God] planted, the work of [His] hands, so that [He] might be glorified (v21).” His Spirit within causes us to be *nice*, to be loved, valuable, worthy. He does this declaring “I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly (v22).” If you are tired of the ups and downs brought on by our external circumstances, be one of those who “shall all be righteous, they shall possess the land forever (Isa 60:21).” Let us Go, See, Follow, and Become.