

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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The Everlasting Way of Life

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

★Thinking...

- What is your view of the *good life*?
- In what ways has focus on the *good life* distracted you from pursuing the *best life*?
- How might you reset your focus on the *best life*?

★Applying...

- Reflect on the whether you have accepted the reality of *Christ in you*.
- If not, take seriously throughout the week God's invitation to dwell within you, cleansing you of all unrighteousness. Pray over it.
- If so, what is one specific thing He wishes to do for you that you are ignoring or resisting instead pursuing the *good life*?
- Commit for one week to give up that pursuit and seek His *best life* by letting Him work through you in this specific way.

★Praying...

- Father, I give up trying to walk the path on my own. Please replace my weakness with your strength that I may remain on your path of righteousness. Cause my heart to desire you more than anything else. May my being please you and I be fully satisfied in that.

Isaiah 26:7-12 – The way of the righteous is level; O Just One, you make smooth the path of the righteous. In the path of your judgments, O Lord, we wait for you; your name and your renown are the soul's desire. My soul yearns for you in the night. My spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. If favor is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness they deal perversely and do not see the majesty of the Lord. O Lord, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed. Let the fire for your adversaries consume them. O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for indeed, all that we have done, you have done for us.

I) **Good...**

Most of us strive for the *good life*. But what is that? Life without thirst and hunger? Secure shelter? Pleasant days? Leisure time? Humanity has defined and redefined this over the generations, setting and resetting the goal to build a way of life capable of achieving it. As with the ongoing experiment how to feed all, we have failed. God offers an eternal vision of the *good life* and the Way into it.

◆**When will you listen?** No civilization has stood the test of time. Think about that. It is stunning. The best hearts and minds have poured themselves out for the noble purpose of perfecting society. An enduring society in which all needs are met and peace rules. Perhaps the apex of this is the *Pax Romana*, Roman peace. Interestingly, this

period coincides with the Incarnation of Christ. It eventually crashed down from corruption, invasion, and revolt. People are proven incapable of devising a permanent *good life*. The most idealistic civilizations "he has brought low...the lofty city he lays low (Isa 26:5)." The Bible is clear, this is not because God works against us "But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear (Zech 7:11)."

◆ **A few good men:** Today, all people are searching for the leader, or leaders, who are willing and able to overcome society's problems and deliver us to the promise of a permanent, sustainable, *good life*. People everywhere pin their hopes on the next national leader or parliament, only to despair in protest and unrest when they fail. The brutal seasonal cycle played out on a national scale. It forces us to wonder why. The simplest explanation is probably best: "Jesus said to him, 'No one is good but God alone (Luke 18:19).'" When Israel rejected God "from being king over them (1 Sam 8:7)," they turned away from the *good life*.

II) Better...

All is not lost. We may have rejected the *good life* under God, but He has not rejected us! While terrible things are happening in the world, God declares to His people that "The way of the righteous is level," because the Just One makes "smooth the path of the righteous (Isa 26:1)." Oh, how we long for that smooth path to the *good life*.

◆ **What do you see?** It is psychologically proven that we see what we want to see when a vision is open to interpretation. A famous example is the Rorschach test, in which we are presented inkblot formations and asked what they represent. Those who want the *good life* look and look, testing various possibilities, but do not find it. Unless they decide "O Lord, we wait for you (v8)." This is a measure of God's grace. Those capable of waiting on the Lord do so because He has awakened their spirit just enough to sense Him (1 Cor 2:12). Those who believe what they sense decide God's ways "are the soul's desire (Isa 26:8)." The soul "yearns for you in the night" and "earnestly seeks (v9)" His path. But can we walk it?

◆ **Anything is better than this:** Over time, as a people have given up on a failed way of life there is revolution and hardship. Lack of the *good life* was miserable enough for revolutionaries to choose this path. Anything was *better* than their present lives. When we seek the "path of the righteous," we pray "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth (Ps 86:11)." We accept the hardship of standing

"In the path of [God's] judgments (Isa 26:8)," knowing that "when your judgments are in the earth, [we] learn righteousness (v9)." We accept the cost to find the *good life* believing it is *better* than enduring the present rat race. But did we "first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether [we have] enough to complete it (Luke 14:28)?"

III) Best...

Many revolutionaries discovered too late they lacked the resources to pay the price for *better*, plunging instead into suffering worse than before. The despair of coming up short, learning one really is unworthy to lead and unable to deliver their people. Christmas is not a memorial of despair, it is the celebration of Hope reborn for ultimate victory. Christmas is the celebration of the *best life*.

◆ **A bridge to nowhere:** The start of revolution is often exciting. Dreams of the *good life* become wishful conversations, plans, the beginnings of a movement. How many of us in our enthusiasms have lurched into action toward a dream without a sound path to achieve them? The wayside is littered with defeated revolutions, defunct businesses, ruined lives. Focusing on favor rather than judgment, we "do not learn righteousness...do not see the majesty of the Lord...do not see (Isa 26:10-11)" the Lord's hand lifted to strike. Far from pleased at those who seek the *good life* without the currency to pay for it, God prepares "the fire for [His] adversaries to consume them (v11)." Bad news, those adversaries are us.

◆ **Open the gift:** How can we be His adversaries? We wait on Him to train us in the ways of His *good life*, we desire it, we seek it... The inescapable problem is we do not have the means to walk the path to its end. We are too weak to drag our sinful heart along. "You will all become deserters because of me this night (Mt 26:31)." Not some – all. Until we see God's "zeal for [His] people (Isa 26:11)," in the advent of His Son, with the Hope that He will give us the means. Seeing this we will be "ashamed (v11)" of our weakness. So much so that we finally hear His offer to "put my spirit within you (Ezek 36:27)," and receive "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27)." *This* is the gift of Christmas, the promise of the *best life*. Through this act, God "will ordain peace for us, for indeed, all that we have done, **you have done for us** (Isa 26:12)." We give up our low desire of the *good life* for the grand goal of His *best life* as we "acknowledge [Jesus's] name alone (v14)," and seek that He is "glorified (v15)." The *best life* is knowing our being pleases Him.