

# Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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## New Year's Resolution

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

★Thinking...

- What is your New Year's Resolution for 2023?
- What *lifestyle* change is required to achieve that *result*?
- How might God transform your inner being to produce that *lifestyle*?

★Applying...

- Identify something specific you need to change to achieve your Resolution.
- Determine the underlying dimension of your being that will resist this change. For example, what part of you causes the craving you must resist, or the fear of what you must do?
- Make an honest decision – commit to allow God to transform that part of your inner being through prayer and *resolve* or accept that part of you and examine why you chose that Resolution.

★Praying...

- Father, I deeply desire [your Resolution]. I accept this result will not come as I am and live today. I give you permission to change me so that I pursue this change with patience and resolve. Please alter my inner being to be more like Jesus. Let this result be visible evidence. If this result is not your will for my life, change my heart to desire your purpose for my life.

**Luke 2:25-32** – Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

### I) Frustration...

Today many dust off the familiar pattern of the New Year's Resolution. Sounds simple. The day comes and we start – or stop – doing something. If it were that simple, we would not need an anchor like New Year's Day to do it. The hard truth is behaviors are deeply ingrained into our lives in complex ways that do not change easily. Perhaps God made us this way for our benefit.

♦ **Any day now**: For many, some dimension of wellness is the goal in the Resolution. We find some program "guaranteed" to produce the *results* we want. January 1<sup>st</sup> rolls around and we begin. What are the odds we will have achieved our goal by the end of the week? What happens when the power of New Year's Day has worn off? The

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023

program feels like work and the sacrifice of old routine is uncomfortable. Simeon can relate. A “righteous and devout,” man, he was eager for “the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25).” The term προσδεχόμενος, here translated “looking forward,” connotes a persistent active search or expectation. We use a wellness program; he searches the Scriptures and prays for the promised Messiah. Like us, he was frustrated at a perceived lack of *results*.

◆ **I need help:** The initial *results* do not justify the discomfort, causing us to lose faith and give up in anger or despair. What we need is a partner, perhaps a trainer we trust who will assure us *results* are coming. One who encourages, holds us accountable. Simeon also needed a partner. He needed a *Comforter*, one who would calm his soul, assure him God would answer his prayers. Graciously, “the Holy Spirit rested on him (v25),” a rare gift at that time, displaying God’s love for those who seek His will.

## II) Patience...

Our trainer asks us to commit to a six-month plan. Skeptical, we think this is a ploy to make easy money off someone desperate. After talking with a few clients, our situation becomes clear. This is going to take time. Maybe we got in over our heads with this Resolution.

◆ **How long?** In the back of our minds, we desire to return to old ways with this new wellness routine a small addition. If we are deeply honest, we seek wellness as a *result*, not a *lifestyle*. We must interrogate the root of the term Resolution: *resolve*. The Holy Spirit gives no shortcut to Simeon. The Spirit reveals to Simeon “that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah (v26).” This recalls for us the story of Abraham, to whom at age seventy-five God promised “to make of you a great nation (Gen 12:2),” but did not grant his first legitimate son until “Abraham was a hundred years old (Gen 21:5).” While we do not know how long Simeon lived with the promise, biblical tradition suggests it was years.

◆ **Forever?** Behind the tactic of a New Year’s Resolution is the fear of what we know lies beneath our desire. Our hope that New Year’s Day is truly a clean slate is the subconscious knowledge our old ways will not yield different *results*. That dimension in which we seek wellness requires a dramatically new *lifestyle*. When we finally accepted this feared reality, we reached out for help. Again, this was at first a tactic, wishing an expert would offer a shortcut, a way to append this new program into our existing *lifestyle*. Ultimately, we face a more perplexing situation than the one with which we began.

We cannot achieve our desired *results* without a new *lifestyle*, and *lifestyle* flows from our inner being. Achieving our goal requires a change in who we are. In Simeon, we find someone who sticks to his *resolve*. Those of us with experience in prayer know the training it takes to hear the voice of God. It is reasonable to suggest that, like Abraham, Simeon’s spirit needed to mature through experience in preparation to be “Guided by the Spirit (Luke 2:27).” Simeon desired the *result* of “the consolation of Israel,” but God’s purpose was to transform Simeon’s inner being and resulting *lifestyle*.

## III) Payoff...

Some of us have at different times in our lives accepted the invitation to be transformed and adopt a new *lifestyle*. The inner desire to be well overrode the comfort of old ways of being and doing, pushing us to become the person we want to be. In the end, navigating the fear and facing the hard truth made the situation crystal clear: do I want to be changed?

◆ **Finish line:** Many wellness programs have observable goals attached. Pounds, blood pressure, minutes. For those that accept the challenge of inner transformation, achieving the goal is a matter of time. Our *resolve* is fixed. One day, now feeling like any other, we reach the goal. A time of celebration! Having been “Guided by the Spirit into the temple (v27),” Simeon saw Jesus and “took him in his arms and praised God (v28).” In God’s transformative work, the fulfillment of His promises can be taken as a sign of our maturation. Patience has its payoff on the day we become ready for our heart’s desire.

◆ **Now what?** By the time we reach the goal, it is often anticlimactic. We no longer seek the *result*. We relish what it feels like to be different. Simeon tells God, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace (v29).” Simeon does not need to see a *result* as the “consolation of Israel.” His “eyes have seen your salvation (v29).” If God fulfilled this promise, all the rest is assured. He is at “peace” because God has developed Simeon’s faith through discomfort, endurance, patience, and hope, “and hope does not disappoint (Rom 5:5).” In the end, Simeon no longer needs to be bound because He is at “peace,” wanting “[God’s] kingdom come. [God’s] will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).”