

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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Expect Inspiration

What purpose do you *expect* to fulfill in your daily life?

What are some ways God might work to open opportunities for you to fulfill that purpose?

How can you prepare to work within those possibilities to make the most of the opportunities God creates?

Acts 2:1-7 – ¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not these who are speaking Galileans?”

I) Running On a Treadmill...

Many of us live routinely. Go to work, do the same thing as the day before, fight the same traffic home, get the kids to the same practice, make the same dinner... Or so it seems. When we accept this as reality, as our lived experience, we expect it. We trade dreams of amazing for a life of blandness. This circumstance is an opportunity for the Thriving Church. It is easy to inspire against this backdrop. The question is, can we the church avoid the same boring lived experience?

♦ **Beauty is in the details:** Reality is no two days are exactly the same. Variation, if small and subtle, is everywhere. Why, then, does life often feel a dull sameness? The issue is us. Humanity's pursuit of progress trains us to identify patterns and ignore minor, irrelevant

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variety. We focus our minds on sensing massive disruptions – good and bad – to our way of life. Everything else we take for granted and come to *expect*. *Expectation* of our own making creates the illusion of blandness. Last week, we saw the apostles seek to know how Jesus would have them build His church. “All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14),” asking His will. When we turn our *expectations* over to another, we open ourselves to anything that might happen, big or small.

◆**Don’t just stand there:** Being open to everything can be paralyzing. Lacking *expectation*, we may lose orientation and grow in fear. Knowing what to *expect*, whether safe or dangerous, permits us to go about our lives. Surely Jesus does not want to paralyze us by removing all *expectation*. Instead, He wants to replace our *expectations* of daily routine with those of His kingdom come. Jesus told His disciples what to *expect*, saying “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation...And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues... (Mark 16:15, 17).” He also told them to expect to “be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now (Acts 1:5).” They patiently waited together a week for this reorientation of new *expectations* to take hold, preparing them for their new lives.

II) Where Are You Going...

Breaking out of the routine to avoid sameness might involve moving to a new town, taking a new job, changing social circles. What do we do if we are unable or unwilling to change our lives in such dramatic ways, but need to see life differently? The apostles’ lives were to be totally different but, in many ways, the same. Most remained in Judea. They still needed to put bread on the table. Their social circles grew but old friends were not replaced. Instead, their mission in life, perception of the world around them, relationship with strangers, these changed. So did their relationship with God.

◆**Half empty?** When our goal in life on a given day is to make it through our obligations and have time for ourselves afterward, everything fits into these two categories. The ways in which today is different than yesterday are lost if they do not fundamentally change our obligations or leisure time. What we need is a change of our goal. Those days praying and trying to accept and understand Jesus’s teachings about the future prepared the apostles for such a change. At Pentecost, “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush

of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2).” The Spirit of God came upon them, restoring His presence in their lives. This time, God was not among them in the form of His Son, but inside them in the form of His Spirit. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (v4),” transforming their life’s purpose within their existing circumstances. Citizens of God’s kingdom know everything is possible that leads to fulfillment of His plans.

◆**Half full:** Changes to our day’s goal bring related changes of our *expectations*. We open ourselves to possibilities of achieving that goal, *expecting* opportunity and obvious obstacles. The chatty barista is not risking my being late to work, she is a new acquaintance who I am supposed to befriend. When “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them (v3),” they were open to what God would do through them to fulfill their new purpose. They “began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability (v4).” Note, it says they were given ability, not forced to speak. They chose to exercise their new power, living out their *expectation* God would use them. Use them, He did.

III) Running the Race...

Far from just making it through the day, the apostles drew the attention of many during one of the largest Jewish parties of the year. Pentecost was one of three festivals that drew people from far and wide. In preparing the known world for the Gospel, the Holy Spirit brought His power upon believers at the precise moment it would affect people whose stories would travel all the empire. When we *expect* God’s will to be done, we make ourselves available for Him to use us.

◆**What if?** Just changing our goals does not create opportunities. That we *expect* opportunities suggests that there is a cosmic power working for us. Amazingly, many who do not claim to believe in God feel this. *The universe wanted it...* Yes, God wants people attracted to us so He can reveal Himself. “And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in their native language of each (v6).” Jesus used His believer’s new *expectations* to upend the *expectations* of others, opening more hearts to His Gospel. Peter, not stunned by this miracle, shows His preparedness in then speaking the Truth powerfully (v14-36). This story shows us how engaging in prayer ushers in God’s power and prepares us for it by altering our *expectations*. When we *expect* God’s miracles, we ready ourselves to work within them. Are you ready?