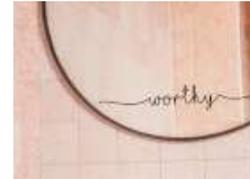


# ***Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life***

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## **Up to the Task**

How could your life be different if you believed your purpose is who you are, not something you have or do?

What areas of your being need work to be more like Jesus? What work is needed?

Who is someone pursuing the wrong purpose in life for whom you want to be a model to imitate? How can you create that opportunity?

**1 Thessalonians 1:2-7, 10** – <sup>2</sup>We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly <sup>3</sup>remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia...<sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

### **I) Seeking Purpose...**

We are made on purpose for a purpose. We know it instinctively. It is the driving factor that gets us out of bed in the morning and propels us throughout the day. We may not think much about purpose, may ignore its source, but few accept the idea of an absurd, meaningless life. We are blessed to enjoy the honor of knowing exactly what that purpose is, how to achieve it, and its reward.

♦ **Fame and fortune:** Looking around, one might believe the purpose of life is to collect the most stuff, possess the newest products, appear the trendiest, or recreate the most. Those of us who have tried this discover it is an exhausting competition with brief benefits. We might

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perceive instead it is to build the biggest brand, largest company, or achieve the grandest title. These efforts often bring out our worst as we sacrifice everything – including our character – to outdo others. In God’s Kingdom, little is said of what we acquire or build. A lot is said about who we become. “We always give thanks to God for all of you (1 Thes 1:2),” a joyful recognition that what we become, what we are, is worthy of gratitude. What we are is “beloved by God, that he has chosen you (v4).” Our purpose is to be God’s chosen people.

◆ **Entitlement:** Much of what is accepted as life’s purpose necessitates achievement. The idea that being chosen is our purpose is contrary, suggesting our purpose originates outside us. Not unlike heirs to thrones and business empires, in which the purpose of the children is to live up to the heritage. That’s true for us. We receive from God “not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (v5).” Receive His Word and know who you are; receive His power and be worthy of the title Child of God; receive His Spirit with conviction and be dedicated to this purpose.

## II) Meaningful Work...

Anything worthwhile takes work. This is another instinctual understanding. We might chafe at unproductive, meaningless work, but few truly enjoy a life of leisure. The risk in misunderstanding our purpose in Jesus is that it requires no work or that the work is unrelated to our purpose. When we begin with knowing the purpose is who we become, we gain clarity about what to do.

◆ **A clear path:** Those convinced the purpose of life is to be affluent have a few paths to choose. Be a good student, get a degree from a prestigious university, pursue a career in one of a few select industries. Be the best in the state in a sport, attend a university that excels at producing professionals, go pro. Refine your image, build a following, promote brands associated with the fantasy lifestyle. What do you do if you want to be a godly person? God pays attention to our “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (v3).” The Christian trio of faith, love, and hope are bound to the human traits of work, labor, and steadfastness (or endurance). It is for these we receive the Spirit’s power.

◆ **The power to arrive:** We know fulfilling purpose takes more than the genetic makeup with which we are born. Many are athletic but not professional athletes. Brilliant but not wealthy surgeons. Beautiful without the fame. Those who reach the pinnacle apply discipline, effort, focus, dedication. It is tempting to think faith, love, and hope do

not require such effort. This is deception! God recognizes that “in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit (v6).” The Holy Spirit’s power is for the purpose of completely changing our response to circumstances, which is a total change of who we are. Faith, love, and hope are new responses to the same world in which we already live. Responses that come through work powered by God’s presence.

## III) Enduring Legacy...

For some, any given purpose for life is sufficient. Thinking about it is too hard. Also, too dangerous. What if it comes up short? Others, we need to know the purpose is worthwhile. That it matters. Good news, the purpose of every Christian life is invaluable.

◆ **Count the cost:** One reason given by the younger generation for not pursuing the paths of their parents is that the purpose is futile. The effort required to accumulate material wealth outweighs the benefits of that wealth. When the purpose is who we are and all we become, the first reward is inspiring others. The author notes the reward of his purpose, “you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake (v5).” This reward is received when our being is so inspiring that people’s hearts open to the Holy Spirit and they “become imitators of us and of the Lord (v6).” We become like Jesus, we inspire others to be like us, they become like Jesus. This cycle continues as those who once followed “became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia (v7).” The first reward is saving your community from a futile way of being.

◆ **Leave your mark:** Imagine the value of pursuing the purpose of fame and fortune is worth the effort – for now. What is the meaning in one hundred years? Two hundred? Related to our innate sense that there is purpose to life is that the purpose is permanent. External purpose has no value beyond death. Wealth, fame, talent, all disappear. Even legacies of monuments and treasured art are at risk of destruction. Not our beings. Intertwined with the search for meaning is the belief that our souls live on past the body. God affirms this in His Word, urging us to invest in an eternal purpose by working to strengthen our spirit. The second reward is the hope in which we “wait for [God’s] Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead (v10).” Not passive waiting, diligent work to be worthy of the presence of Jesus, “who rescues us from the wrath that is coming (v10).” God chose us as worthy to be called, worthy to empower. The question is will we receive and apply what He offers?