

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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Inspire Generously

What problem in the world nags at you, *inspiring* you to cause change?

What is required – resources, talent, time, knowledge, etc. – to create the change?

What contribution can we make today toward that change in our community?

Acts 6:1-6 – ¹Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ²And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” ⁵What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

1) I Want to Change the World...

We dream big dreams. From a young age we see problems in the world and dream about fixing them. Something happens to us as we grow up. Reality sets in, our dreams shrink, we struggle to simply survive. But not all of us. Thank God, He has shown those of us who want to *inspire* our community how we go about changing their world.

♦ **Where do we start?** Poverty, violence, substance abuse, racism, inequality, lawlessness... Which comes first? Overwhelmed, we could give up and distance ourselves from world’s issues. We could argue among ourselves about what to do rather than doing anything.

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“Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1).” At a critical moment in the church’s formation, such an argument threatened everything. Imagine how easy the Hellenists and Hebrews could have become angry, vilifying the other, fracturing the church, causing it to crumble. The Holy Spirit intervened, humbling the apostles to receive a complaint not as threat but opportunity. *Inspiring* the community means first acknowledging issues regardless how presented.

◆ **I can only do so much**: Now what? None of us can do everything. As Jesus makes us sensitive to the need all around us, how do we keep from frustration, burnout, despair? The apostles, guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, responded “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God (v2).” Instead saying, “friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task (v3).” They did not drop what they were doing, nor did they make excuses. They recognized the growing power of Jesus’s church. So much so that the request for help was not for just anyone willing to volunteer – they asked for nominations of qualified, capable workers. Our God is full of abundance for those fulfilling His purposes.

II) What Can I Do...

The opportunity was not one for the church as separate institution, but for the church as community of heirs to God’s kingdom. *Inspiration* is fullest when we move from feelings of compassion and demands for change to acts of *generosity*. Direct actions, through which we change someone’s circumstances. These are the *signs and wonders* that impact the world around us.

◆ **Working together**: Changing the world, even in just one way, is a monumental project. Every large project can be broken down into a series of achievable tasks. A plan. Plans enable partnership and coordination, the ability for many to work in harmony toward a common purpose. The apostles understood their mission requires accurately teaching the Word of God. It also requires direct acts of *generosity* that open hearts to receive the Word. They could not do both, but working together, the church could. In asking others to “wait on tables (v2),” they were committing to “devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word (v4).” More than delegation, this was acknowledgement of the worthiness of everyone in the community to serve the purposes of

God. In so doing, each had the opportunity to live up to their calling as a child of God.

◆ **We got this**: One corrosive way in which the world opposes God’s kingdom is the suggestion that someone else should fix it. That we can only demand change from those in charge. Accepting a victim’s mentality. The apostles reject this, pursuing Jesus’s way instead. A way *inspiring, attractive* because of its *generosity* and expression of God’s *love* and *power*. “What they said pleased the whole community... (v5).” It is pleasing to those in need. It is also pleasing to those in the church ready and wanting to share in God’s *generosity*. Seven are chosen, at least one noted as “full of faith and the Holy Spirit (v5).” Union in the church moves us from needing miracles to receiving them to working them on behalf of others. Weakness to strength.

III) The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of the Parts...

I’m not changing the world, I’m just changing diapers. None of us can change the world on our own. We can each change someone’s circumstances, and the combination of small changes adds up to something enormous.

◆ **Unified**: Individuals unify into a body as each moves from outsider in need to insider serving others. Parts unifying into a whole with a common mission and aligned purposes. Stephen, Philip, and the others were now unified with Peter, John, and the apostles with the mission of bringing about God’s kingdom on earth. “They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (v6).” You are in me, I am in you, we are in Jesus, and He in us. Each doing the part that perfects us individually in Christ. When each of us accepts Jesus’s invitation to *Follow Him*, He transforms us into His image, expressed as the exact miracle someone else needs now.

◆ **Be the Miracle**: Jesus *inspires* others to receive the Holy Spirit by demonstrating His power, celebrating God’s presence, praying His will be done, consistently expecting His miracles, being attractive to others, and living intimately in joy. The cycle returns as we, once in need, seek opportunities for *generosity*, which open ears to our *bold testimony*. *Generosity* with time, talent, and treasure. Food was purchased for others. People took time and effort to distribute it. As they did, they “did great wonders and signs among the people (v8),” continuing the cycle. Are you ready to be *generous*, to be the miracle in someone’s life today?