

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

Thrive with us by following on Instagram and YouTube  
@FlagNazChurch, @FlagNazYouth and FlagNaz.org



## **Get Your Exercise**

How do you recognize the presence of God and respond to it today?

What excuses are you using to hide from Him and to resist being moved?

What is your truth that you are hiding behind those excuses?

What would your life become if you allowed Jesus to heal the hurt and shame of your truth?

**Genesis 3:8-11** – <sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup>He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” <sup>11</sup>He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

### **I) First Mover...**

Some of us are fortunate to have another invite us to join them in being active. Others, we are the active ones inviting others. One way or another, there is often a first mover. One who uses their positive relationships to influence others into activity. Our ultimate first mover is God Himself. He comes to us, making His movement and presence observable. The situation suggests invitation, an invitation repeated throughout biblical history. Whether we joyfully accept the invitation to move or make excuses for our idleness, God’s movement will not be ignored.

◆ **It’s go time:** Few tactics are better at moving people than an appointment. Get someone to commit to meeting at a time and place, odds are good things will happen. Appointments can’t be snoozed or procrastinated. They are either kept or not. They are powerful tools for us to act in our own best interests when we are developing healthy

September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

habits and when we sense weakness creeping in around them. We perceive that God had an appointment with the man and woman as “They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze (Gen 3:8).” They knew the sound and anticipated He was seeking them. This is an interesting event. God’s presence extends everywhere, and He is perpetually moving in our lives. Yet this particular motion is noticeable to us. God is intentional in drawing our attention when He wants to move us.

◆**Maybe He won’t notice:** When appointments fail to move us, we rarely have the courage to admit our choice to be idle. The easiest option is to hide. Most of the time this delays an increasingly awkward confrontation. In the moment, though, it avoids the discomfort of confessing weakness. We will deal with the awkwardness at the last moment—or not at all if possible. The man and woman have decided to blow off today’s divine appointment, so they “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden (v8).” Their great weakness is not skipping—it’s being so ashamed that they have become lesser people.

## II) No Excuses...

Great companions are people who cut through our veneer of false excuses. They hold us to the high standard of who we want to be. They love us, believe in our true potential, and are willing to endure awkward moments to draw out our best. It is through these loving confrontations we overcome our weaknesses. In some cases we immediately toss aside our flimsy excuse and avoid disappointment. Others, the truth revealed in confrontation needs time to move us. God’s Word, especially His loving confrontational Word, never returns void.

◆**He won’t take No for an answer:** A text message. Another. There’s the phone call. And another one. Great companions do not passively accept our absence from an appointment. They reach out, wishing us to be running late, then intent on moving us out of our rebellion. They recognize that new or uncomfortable healthy habits might require ongoing persuasion. When God finds the man absent, He “called out to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you (v9)?’” He confronts us in our weakness to draw out our strength over physical and spiritual atrophy. Unfortunately, in this case the man is buried under the impossible burden of shame.

◆**Too late:** There are lame excuses we abandon with the slightest pressure. *I’m too tired to go for a walk today.* There are also significant

excuses that, while the cause may be illegitimate, are going to inhibit us from keeping our appointment. The best version of ourselves prioritizes our healthy habits enough to protect them from becoming collateral damage to seemingly unrelated poor choices. *I’m not going out tonight because I refuse to miss our walk before work tomorrow.* Sadly, we often learn that lesson the hard way. The man replies to God, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (v10).” The source of shame is not being too weak to stand before God—it is having rejected God’s command and in so doing discovering how inferior we are. Our nakedness. We neglect our purpose when we do not make every life choice for the sake of being our best.

## III) Start Where You Are...

There is always truth hidden inside our excuses. A truth we hide from because we are ashamed of it. Weakness eroding our will from doing what is right. Recognition we have been doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, reasons that will not sustain the behavior. A change in us that we no longer desire the right thing. Whatever we try to hide in the darkness of an excuse will be brought to light in loving confrontation.

◆**Yes, I know:** Loving confrontation does not accept excuses. It asks what happened. It seeks to reveal the truth. Wise companions pursue the truth by inquiry. God asks, “Who told you that you were naked (v11)?” We ought to ponder this question. If someone had told the man, how might God have responded? We might imagine Him saying, *you’ve always been naked...that’s nothing new or offensive to me.* This is a key lesson for us. Our feelings of unworthiness do not justify avoiding God. His choice of us **makes** us worthy. Grace, always grace.

◆**It’s over:** This story ends unhappily. God knows the damage of the fruit is permanent. The man and woman will refuse to acknowledge the truth and be healed in repentance. “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat (v11),” is the loving confrontation of a breaking heart. We will not forget our nakedness and have begun a cycle of hiding behind excuse after excuse. But this is not the end. God anticipates the moment we desperately give up our excuses. He has already prepared the renewal of our divine appointment. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus assure us we can be truthful with God and rely on His abiding mercy and grace. He never stops inviting us to join Him in His healthy habits. Hear Him say “Follow Me” today and let Him build you into your best self.