

# ***SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR THRIVING LIFE***

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## **INFINITE VALUE**

What are the signs for which you look to know you are favored by God?

Reflect on the exchanges you make in daily life. Do you give and receive fair value? If not, what changes would you make to balance your trade?

How do you interpret the phrase “support the weak”?

Given your interpretation, how does supporting your own material needs allow you to support the weak?

**Acts 20:32-35** – <sup>32</sup>And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup>I coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup>You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. <sup>35</sup>In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

### **1) Be Favored...**

There is a romantic element in ancient traditions about the favor of the gods. The idea that unexplainable good and poor luck is the whimsy of cosmic powers. When received, we mere mortals have inspired divine emotional affinity. Denied, we have stirred anger. Like many myths, there is truth buried under severe misunderstanding in this idea. Yes, divine power is active in our lives. But it is not whimsical, nor does it change. When we live within the will of God, we are within His favor. Otherwise, we choose to be outside of it. The whimsy and variation we experience is our zigging and zagging in, around, and far away from the divine. If you are ready to continually grow in the favor of the King, He has laid out a clear path that leads to it. Be holy as He is holy.

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◆**Turn to grace:** We imagine the healing of blindness as an instantaneous ability to perceive clearly. What if it isn't? What if the moment at which our eyes are opened is disorienting? Imagine seeing an apple for the first time. We would only know it to be an apple if someone else told us, or we inspected it with our hands, nose, and mouth. As the soul's eyes open to see the truth of Jesus, we likewise need to be trained to recognize the things we now perceive. Only, we have no other senses to aid us. It must be divine revelation. We cannot overstate the importance of this dimension of Jesus incarnation. It has been passed down ever since. One day, we have been trained to apprehend these things directly. Such it is that our teacher says, "now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace (Acts 20:32)." When we see God clearly, it is time to turn directly to His grace.

◆**Know your story:** His grace is the favor He dispenses to those He loves. The power of the message of His grace is its proclamation. His message—His Gospel—is His royal decree that you and I, who once were the beloved heirs of His kingdom, have been reinstated. We only need to accept His invitation to return and be willing to do the King's business. This is "a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified (v32)." The message is His version of our story. When we know our story, we know the way to be and remain in God's favor. Know your story, believe your story, live your story.

## II) Be Grounded...

Human wisdom would separate the spiritual and the physical. Biblical wisdom pursues the spiritual *through* the physical. There is purpose in our bodies, which were made to make the invisible God visible. Our spirits look upon the face of God so that our bodies can reflect Him. Our spiritual pursuit reforms our relationship with the physical world. Being favored by God means being grounded in His creation for the purpose of making Him known.

◆**True value:** One aspect of our proper relationship to creation is recognizing its value. We have legitimate physical needs that are satisfied by material goods. We need food, shelter, and clothing to survive. These are means to an end. They are not our source of hope and joy. Yet Satan wants to deceive us into believing they are. When we grasp that being in God's favor produces true hope and joy, we can say "I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing (v33)." This is not denying our needs. It is being humble enough to be satisfied when they

are met less luxuriously than those around us. Be grounded and know that the true value of material goods can be no greater than meeting a basic need. Our glory is being built up in the image of Jesus.

◆**Do the work:** This leads to another aspect of a right relationship to creation. God's message of grace, our return to royalty, is worth infinitely more than any created thing. Accepting payment for it is the same as equating its value to that payment. When the apostle says, "I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions (v34)," he is making this point. We do the work to serve each other's material need by trading labor for goods. We freely share the spiritual bounty that was freely given to us. Something of incomparable value should not be exchanged for anything. By giving it away, we express the inestimable value God places upon each of us.

## III) Be Blessed...

True blessing is to know God. The more we live within His will, the more He finds us worthy to know Him more. Eventually, He reveals Himself fully to us so that we can reflect Him perfectly into all creation. This is the process of spiritual maturation. Through it we can support those whose faith is weaker because we have no need of them and can act in tender love that protects them where they are vulnerable.

◆**Distribute the proceeds:** Our ability to share anything comes from being provided more than we need. We express an infinite God by living as though the spiritual gifts He has given cannot be exhausted. They can't. We have enough patience to be compassionate to someone too hurt to respond with kindness. We have the gentleness to defuse someone on the edge. We must simply believe. We do these things because "by such work we must support the weak (v35)." Not support as charity. Support as revelation that will strengthen their faith that if God has given us so much, He might give equally to them. When we behave as heirs of the kingdom while telling others they are co-heirs with us, they start to believe this could be their story, too.

◆**Member of the court:** We can give so much because we have received more. More of the character of Jesus. More direct knowledge of God and His grace. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive (v35)," because to give in the name of God is to first know God. The more we give, the more we must first have received. We have already received everything. We frustrate ourselves by refusing to believe and instead living out a partial faith. Partial faith yields partial truth. Extreme faith, extreme truth. We enter Jesus' inner circle, become a member of His royal court, when we act like we belong.