

What's Your New Year's Resolution?

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What Does The Lord Require / Micah 6:1-8; Micah 6:1-5

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I'm sure you all know or remember what this time of year is like. You've probably spent a lot of the Christmas season eating more, potentially spending more, not exercising as much, and so when the New Year starts some of these habits may lead to a New Year's Resolution. I remember making new year's resolutions throughout my life, for them to last all of a month or 2, and then go back to my old habits. Well, there was one particular year, I want to say about 6 years ago, I decided I wasn't going to do a New Year's Resolutions, or at least the type I had done in the past. Instead, a church I was connected via emails sent out a 21 day of prayer and fasting for the first 21 days of January and I thought it was a perfect time to do that, particularly since I struggle with seasonal affective disorder in the winter months so this could be a way to help me through the longer winter days. Now, while fasting often speaks to food, this could be a fasting from anything that

took your attention away from your time with God.

This is what the prayer/fast would state at the beginning.

“Throughout the centuries, believers have practiced a variety of habits that lead to spiritual growth. More than religious rituals, these habits (or spiritual disciplines) have served as opportunities to seek God’s heart and experience spiritual breakthrough. Some of the more common examples include Prayer, Bible Reading, Worship, and Fasting, but others such as Simplicity, Solitude, Memorization, Silence, and Christian Meditation can also reap huge spiritual rewards. The focus is not on the acts, but on the goal of drawing closer to God and experiencing more of His power and presence in our lives. During the next three weeks, our church family will be joining together to seek God's heart for our lives, our church, and our world. Using this guide, each day will feature a different activity, prayer focus, and Scripture passage(s). You’re also encouraged to practice fasting during these three weeks, and various other spiritual disciplines will be highlighted on specific days. You may wish to keep a notebook or journal, too, to record your experiences and insights from day to day. Our desire is that this will be a season when we see a fresh move of God in our midst—when His power and His glory is made evident to all. May God bless you as you devote yourself to this season of growth. Welcome to 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting.”

These 21 days were a time when I remember telling God to use me for His kingdom, and well, it's been an incredible journey ever since that moment, and it was these first 3 weeks of January. This fall for my Old Testament course exam, I was to write a reflection on the passage, Micah 6:1-8 which reminded me of these 21 days, 6 years ago and the faith journey I have been on ever since. For today we're going to focus on the first five verses. Micah is stating Yahweh's case against Israel, and next week we'll focus on verses 6 and 7 that Spencer will be preaching on and then lastly week 3, verse 8, when I will share with you my Old Testament course exam. A reflection I wrote as my exam, which focused on this last verse.

Let these next 3 weeks (and beyond) be a time for self-reflection, a sort of New Year's Resolution between you and God. To self-examine and draw closer to God.

The Book of Micah, nestled in the Minor Prophets, is a striking message that combines both judgment and hope. Micah's ministry occurred during a time of spiritual decay, moral corruption, and social injustice. The people of Israel were engaged in religious ritualism without true devotion to God, and their leaders were corrupt. In this context, God issues a powerful call to accountability. The first 5 verses of Micah 6 again.

Micah 6:1–5 “Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. “O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.””

I love a good movie or TV show based around a court scene. Growing up and through the years I have fond memories of watching Matlock or Nightcourt in my earlier years or Law and Order years later on TV, but as I mentioned to you in the fall, the most famous court scene I remember from one of my favourite movies takes place in A Few Good Men. So, just a quick reminder: In A Few Good Men, Tom Cruise plays Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee, a Navy lawyer, who is assigned to defend two marines who carried out an order that led to someone’s death. As a lawyer he is questioning Colonel Nathan Jessup in court, played by Jack Nicholson, in front of a jury made up of members of the United States Marine Corps Judge Advocate Division. Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise) is questioning Colonel Jessup (Jack Nicholson) as to whether or not he

gave the two marines he's defending the order which led to another marines death, the code red as they say. Colonel Jessup on the stand asks Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee if he wants the truth. Lieutenant Kaffee says that he does, to which Colonel Jessup replies with the famous line from the movie, "You can't handle the truth!"

In Micah 6:1-5, Micah first begins with Hear or Listen. We often need to be reminded to hear or listen instead of always speaking. Micah then describes God presenting a courtroom scene, with the mountains and hills as witnesses against Israel. Inanimate objects were called as third-party witnesses because they were witnesses to his covenant. This is seen elsewhere in Deuteronomy 32:1 "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth." or Joshua 24:27 "Joshua said to all the people, "See, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, if you deal falsely with your God."" or Isaiah 1:2 "Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." A very similar call to that found in Micah 6:1.

The covenant Lord summons the people of his kingdom to appear in court and present their case or defense in the presence of the mountains as witnesses. In this court room it is Yahweh vs. Israel.

This court scene though is different than many of the ones I have watched on TV or in the movies. Most often I can't place myself in the scenes or the happenings that go on as I am far removed from the accusations, but this is a court room where we can all place ourselves as the defendant. In this courtroom the defendant (God's people) are accused of betrayal, even though Yahweh has only shown grace and favor. The prosecutor lays out a clear case, showing evidence of unfaithfulness.

The focus is on Israel's failure (or our own when we place ourselves in this court room) to recognize God's past faithfulness and the ingratitude they've shown. The people are told to "plead their case" or "make their defense." Think back to this past year or the years gone by, have you not failed to recognize God's past faithfulness and have shown a lack of gratitude to God for what he's done. I know there are times I have.

One of the things that God wants us to do, and he says it over and over in scripture is to practice gratitude. The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Learn gratitude in all circumstances. There's always something you can be grateful for. Experts have told us that gratitude is the healthiest human emotion. It makes you more resistant to stress and less susceptible to illness. It increases your overall happiness and satisfaction. It can

give you life more meaning and significance. Often times the more grateful a person is, the happier they are. That's the power of gratitude.

A teacher colleague of mine from a few years ago started a daily gratitude journal, every day writing down something that she was grateful, for after she lost her husband with their daughter still in elementary school and she found it very helpful. Another friend was encouraged by a sermon by Philip Woodworth to reflect on the year through the lens of seeing our 'highlight reels' as the provision of God. As she said, "It is good to look back on our years and see where God has shown up - and many times we have nothing to do with it." I'm sharing with you her template that she used and is available in the entry way. Now while she did it by looking at the past year so for 2024, I find I can struggle to think back to things that happened specifically in each month, so I'm going to use it for the coming year to reflect on at the end of each month and then next December I can use it to reflect on the whole year.

Cultivate the habit of gratitude. Discover how to stay in God's will, how to defeat discouragement, how to conquer complaining, how to reduce stress, and how to experience God's blessing through gratitude.

In Micah, God brings a grievance against his people. God's opening word is one of pleading: my people. God satirically claims to search his own heart and actions. Can it be his

own fault that they have cooled in their affections toward him?

What have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me. God's primary question to Israel: "What have I done to you? How have I wearied you?" is a call for self-reflection. Has God been unjust or unfaithful. He calls them to consider His actions and their response.

God is ready to hear evidence against himself, if such can be made. Is there something he has done to drive Israel from him, to encourage apathy and neglect? Has he let them down, or somehow failed to do his part? Clearly the only disappointment has been on Yahweh's side; Israel has no excuse. We have no excuse. The words of defense have the force of an implicit accusation. Yahweh's words have the force of an implicit accusation. Similar to that found in Isaiah 5:4, "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?"

Israel is reminded of the debt they owe to the grace of Yahweh. Micah reminisces of the powerful ways Yahweh has intervened in their history, bringing up specific examples, such as their exodus out of Egypt. While we were not alive on earth to witness these righteous saving acts of God which favored the Israelites that Micah describes, we read about them in scripture. We have seen though what God has done for us in our own history, and yet I know, and

if you were honest you, can still sometimes struggle to be obedient to God's call.

The evidence is all in support of Yahweh, and he proceeds to set it out. The history of Israel is a history of covenant grace. God's basic act of grace on behalf of his covenant people was the Exodus. Psalmists and prophets look back as proof and pledge of God's election love and saving power. It was the first of a chain of blessings. God not only brought Israel out but up. Bringing them safe and sound to the promised land.

In verse 4 God says I brought you up out of Egypt, he was linking the past history of the nation with the present generation, which we can then infer into our own generation. This was no ancient history. They had a share in the Exodus event even though they weren't there, just like we do. We are also representatives of this larger entity. The exodus symbolizes not only the covenant love of God but also his claim upon the covenant loyalty of his people. This liberation was intended to create a permanent bond of allegiance between him and their descendants. Memories, such as the exodus and the foiled plot of kings such as Balak, should move them toward a commitment to God that shows itself in a radically different way of life. What less should they (and us) give than total obedience to his claims in every area of life? God is saying, how many more examples do I have to give to know the righteous acts of

the Lord? Their history of salvation is summarized as Yahweh's righteous acts, such as it is with our salvation.

In the first part of Micah he painted a desperate picture of Israel and Judah. The people had rejected God's covenant, commands, and counsel. Yet they loved to boast that they were Jews, the descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, the recipients of His law. Like many people today, however, the people of Israel and Judah had become very good at professing what they believed but they had given up practicing it. Micah appeals to the people to hear Yahweh's revelation to them. As a community to remember where they have come from, what they have gone through. To contemplate the past has the opportunity for them to consider how they might act redemptively toward one another in the present and thus emulate within the community what God had done for them in their history. To not take hold of these narratives is to become something other than what they were called to be. Narratives not only can ground identity; they also clarify accountability. The call to remember God's past faithfulness, to show gratitude, is not merely though about recalling events. It is about recognizing that God's past actions need to shape Israel's present faithfulness, our faithfulness. Their ingratitude is the root of their spiritual decline. The good news is that God is still faithful, even when we are unfaithful. He calls us to return to Him, just as He called

Israel to remember His past deeds and respond in faithfulness.

Today is known as Epiphany Sunday, the revelation of Jesus Christ to the nations.

Epiphany, which means ‘manifestation’ or ‘revelation,’ marks the time when the **Magi**—the wise men from the East—traveled to see the baby Jesus, led by a star. They had been waiting, searching, and longing for the coming of a Savior, and when they finally found Him, their response was one of **worship** and **gratitude**. They were willing to go to any length to find the truth and they didn’t stop until they met Jesus. They came for the right reason (for worship, to show gratitude, and to love him). They gave Jesus the best that they had.

Take a moment to consider how you have responded to God’s revelation in your life. Have you, like the Magi, allowed your heart to be filled with gratitude? Have you offered your gift, your time, your talent, and your resources in response to the love of Christ? Or have you grown complacent, taking the light of Christ for granted?”

Be a truth seeker the aim of judicial court systems, and just like the wise men, take the time and trouble to find the truth, ask questions, study, the wise men watched what was happening around them and they were willing to do whatever it took to find the answers. And they were

gracious.

So, put yourself in this courtroom Micah describes of the Israelites vs. Yahweh, or you vs. Yahweh. Recognize your part. Handle the truth that Yahweh brings. Do not take for granted all that God has done in your life. Regularly remember God's goodness and thank him. Remember God's past protection will help you see his present provision, and all that he will do in the future. Reflect. Reflect on your relationship with God and examine whether your life responds to His faithfulness with gratitude, obedience, and holiness. As we begin this new year, let your resolution focus not on the things of this world but Listen, hear Yahweh's revelation to you. So, what are you going to give a God who has everything?