

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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False Idols

In what ways have you compromised your values out of necessity at work, in community, in relation to government?

Looking back, is there a moment when you felt no choice but compromise in which waiting on God could have opened a hidden way?

What possibilities do you imagine for navigating corrupt systems without violating your godly integrity?

Micah 1:2-7 – ²Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it; and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. ³For lo, the Lord is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. ⁴Then the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will burst open, like wax near the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. ⁵All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? ⁶Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour down her stones into the valley, and uncover her foundations. ⁷All her images shall be beaten to pieces, all her wages shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste; for as the wages of a prostitute she gathered them, and as the wages of a prostitute they shall again be used.

I) Trapped...

We have encountered someone trapped between a rock and a hard place. Working for a company whose policies constrain them, they are forced to disappoint despite agreeing with us. *No, I wish I could, but our policy won't let me.* It is an uncomfortable position in which to find ourselves. One with real consequences. The prophecy of Micah informs us we are spiritually trapped in such a conundrum and reveals God's perspective on our plight.

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♦**Compromise:** For most of us the real issue is acting unjustly or mercilessly. Without compassion. This goes against our values. We are told that while working we must accept and act on company values. Our conscience – and some customers – do not cut us slack. Nor does God, who is “a witness against you (Micah 1:2).” None of us are excluded, as God’s Word begins by telling us “Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it (ibid).”

♦**Powerless:** When a customer gets heated with this employee, they often defend themselves, *it’s not my fault, there’s nothing I can do.* In a way, that’s true. This front-line employee cannot change policy. The customer, though, sees the employee as the face of the unjust, merciless company. God sees us as idolizing the systems we inhabit. He “will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth (v3),” which are the places of idolatrous worship.

II) No Choice...

Going to work does not *feel* like an act of worship. For many, it *feels* anything but worship. We are not pledging allegiance to the company, we need the paycheck. As we will see, it is this economic system and the way of life it demands that God sees us as worshipping. He intends to destroy it and lay its inadequacies bare.

♦**Faithless:** The rock in the metaphor is economic need. One way or another we need income for food, shelter, clothing. The hard place is our values. What do we do if the only company offering work is one who violates our values? We could remember the source of our values, our identity as children of God, heirs of His kingdom, assured of His abundance. We forget instead, allowing the rock of need crush us into the hard place of compromise. His response is to declare “the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will burst open, like wax near the fire, like waters poured down a steep place (v4).” He will remove the rock, exposing our lack of faith.

♦**Sins of the parents:** This is the way it is, we have no control over it. This suggests God expects us to suffer hunger and cold, a miserable life and premature death. It is unfair that we be punished for the way society is. He reminds us that He warned His people “in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day (1 Sam 8:18).” He points to this choice, saying “What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem (Micah 1:5)?” As a people, we chose the corrupt systems of power modeled by idolators rather than be led by our God.

One day, we too began worshipping the systems of power embodied in economic and political capitals.

III) No Way Out...

In our lifetimes it has always been this way. We can describe it in shorthand: Too Big to Fail. What would we do if the big banks, big industries, big governments came crashing down? There is no choice but sustain them because they are the source of our way of life. Which is precisely God’s point. He envisions a different way of life even when we do not.

♦**Glimmers:** Something interesting happened in this environment beginning in 2020. At one time, this confrontation between employee and customer would have occurred in an office. Today, it as likely happens through our phones or computers. Temples of commerce once bustling with people sit mostly empty, ghosts of a prior age. Many blame society’s and government’s response to a health crisis. The community of faith would be wise to seek His presence in this. We observe God exert His sovereign rule over all creation, shaking the foundations of our idols. How close we were to God rending “Samaria a heap in the open country, a place for planting vineyards (v6).” Over time, emptiness leads to disrepair and decay, and “her images shall be beaten to pieces, all her wages shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste (v7).”

♦**Black swans:** Years and years, a full career has been built working for that company. Getting off the frontlines, learning the business reasons for the policies once despised, now shaping similar ones that drive profitable growth and personal prosperity. It is easy to go from compromise to conformance, tolerance to participation. It is rewarding. Those rewards are blessings, right? Be careful. Many have built earthly fortunes only for them to be decimated when God moves. He is not laying waste only to the symbols of corrupt economic and political systems. He declares “for as the wages of a prostitute she gathered them, and as the wages of a prostitute they shall again be used (v7).”

♦**A hidden way:** The beginnings of Micah’s prophecy are God’s harsh judgment. There is hope, however. We see the glimmers in the language. Human designs replaced with God’s. Cities for vineyards. He intends to be our provider for all things. Food, shelter, clothing, spiritual sustenance, our way of life. Jesus incarnates this movement of His, providing the fullness of Life. Prepare your hearts for the fullness of His Hope.