

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

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## **More Than Conqueror**

In what ways do the symptoms you want treated indicate a deeper spiritual issue?

What does exile from society's way of life mean to you?

Have you encountered the unpredictability of life that comes from relying on God rather than the world's systems?

If you have, what is one way in which that is a lived experience?

**Micah 1:8-9, 15-16** – <sup>8</sup>For this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches. <sup>9</sup>For her wound is incurable. It has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people... <sup>15</sup>I will again bring a conqueror upon you, inhabitants of Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam. <sup>16</sup>Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your pampered children; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they have gone from you into exile.

### **I) No Fixer Upper...**

Fixer upper. A property that has potential. A few repairs here, some maintenance there, an addition or two and it will be beautiful. We love the idea that decayed things can be brought back to life. So does Jesus. Unlike many popular fixer upper fantasies, He does not see superficial flaws needing attention. There are irreparable flaws in our foundation. This project will be neither cheap nor easy.

♦**Flood damage**: People who endure flooding are often in for a miserable experience. It may appear to be a simple matter of removing the water and repairing flooring. A professional might identify wood and drywall damage, mold, electrical issues—the need to tear the place down to the studs. A complete upturning of life. When God decides it is time to restore our lives, we too are in for a major project. Micah understands this and “will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like ostriches (Micah 1:8).” This is no simple fixer upper.

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◆ **Money pit:** We may be tempted to negotiate. Surely the walls do not need to be torn out, they barely got wet. The electrical systems seem to work okay. It can't be a total tear down! A good contractor will patiently listen, then show evidence that demonstrates the corruption of the structure. If we fix only the quick and easy, the place will be a never-ending money pit. Jesus sees that society's "wound is incurable (v9)." We may see only surface systems to address. Inequality, violence, bribery, these can be fixed with a few programs and laws...right? If that were true, the prophets speaking God's message of repentance for some 200 years would have cured the wound. His radical cure "has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, Jerusalem (v9)."

## II) You Can't Stay Here...

Most of us, like it or not, eventually accept the professional judgment of a contractor. Those who do not may be forced to give up their property. Local governments condemn uninhabitable properties for the safety of all. Jesus prefers to persuade us to accept his radical plan for restoring us into the image of God. If we do not accept, eventually He too will force the issue. Our clock is ticking.

◆ **Condemned:** If we stubbornly decide to avoid the complete restoration of the house, it will eventually become uninhabitable. Finally, local authorities can condemn the house and evict any remaining residents. Extreme and rare, yes. Unfortunately, this is our spiritual situation. Despite worsening deterioration for generations, we refuse to tear our way of life down and rebuild its foundation. God declares "I will again bring a conqueror upon you (v15)." As with many prophecies, this is both literal and figurative. Armed conquerors have taken cities and nations from God's chosen people again and again. In each case, it has decimated the hearts of those who falsely believed their ways were God's ways, that He would protect them from such despair. Instead, hope found in the despair is the vessel of grace that unexpectedly drove them back to Him.

◆ **Exile:** Often people do not want to remove themselves from their home while it is repaired because they have nowhere else to go. Maybe a temporary shelter, a hotel. Perhaps stay with friends. Nothing comfortable. In these we lack full privacy, our possessions, appliances. Our entire way of life is disrupted by the instability of living conditions. When God brings His conqueror, His people who He calls "the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam (v15)." The same Adullam of which it is said, "David left there and escaped to the cave of

Adullam (1 Sam 22:1)," when he was fleeing for his life from King Saul. God is again exiling His people to preserve them while He cleans house. Much like David, the coming years of rebuilding a life on the foundation of Jesus will be unstable, uncertain, and uncomfortable.

## III) Nothing Remains the Same...

Having been forcibly removed from the condemned house, now what? Dream as we might it will be a brief expulsion, such disrepair is rarely corrected swiftly. Instead, reality sets in and we confront our emotions as we accept our way of life is indefinitely gone, perhaps forever. Our Loving Father, acknowledging the long discomfort we are about to face, grants us rituals of grieving to transition us into the phase of exile and assure us with His hope.

◆ **You look sad:** Those who have lived out of a suitcase understand what it means to reduce one's wardrobe. No longer able to dress for every occasion, we wear what we have available to us. Hosting gatherings is out of the question. Our engagement with society and our appearance within it change in ways that signal our distress. God suggests to His people that they adopt their signals of distress, calling them to "Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your pampered children; make yourselves as bald as the eagle (Micah 1:16)." This grieving ritual expresses their sadness in a recognizable way in which they commiserate as community. A form of encouragement through distress. Sad and resigned, yes, but not destroyed.

◆ **Hope for the future:** We must return to the reason the house is stripped to its foundation and rebuilt. It had decayed to the point it was uninhabitable. The period of uncomfortable removal is for the sake of rebuilding a structure worthy of being called home. Remaining was to be destroyed in the demise of the decrepit building. Leaving was and is the only hope for a new, healthy, permanent home, one that if maintained will last a lifetime. In the grieving ritual, we hear the whisper of God's redemptive plan. He tells them to grieve because their children "have gone from you into exile (v16)." This is not a death sentence – it is a period of removal for revitalization, painful as it might be.

◆ **Restoration:** Jesus is more than a conqueror. If He came to conquer, permanent enslavement or death would be the final chapter. It isn't. He is a restorer, healer, redeemer. There is no hope found in a comfortable but temporary reprieve from a symptom. Our hope is found in holistic, dramatic, permanent but uncomfortable healing.