

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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Life of Faith

What ways of the life of faith might you be exchanging for demands of so-called reality?

What would be the specific consequences of dropping those demands?

What might you gain if you chose instead the ways of a life of faith?

Micah 2:1-5: ¹Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power. ²They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance. ³Therefore thus says the Lord: Now, I am devising against this family an evil from which you cannot remove your necks; and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time. ⁴On that day they shall take up a taunt song against you, and wail with bitter lamentation, and say, "We are utterly ruined; the Lord alters the inheritance of my people; how he removes it from me! Among our captors he parcels out our fields." ⁵Therefore you will have no one to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord.

I) Sleepless Nights...

What captures the imagination as the day ends and sleep is near? What grabs the first thought of the day as consciousness returns? Many of us, the burden of the day to come. The schedule, demands, to-do list, commitments. This is by design. Not God's design. Satan's. The prince of this world is a master of distraction through temptation. Temptation to satisfy our fleshly desires. Temptation to believe there is no other way. He pits the life of faith against so-called reality in each of our hearts and minds. The Bible teaches us that God always bends

reality to reveal the truth of a life of faith in the end, pulling the rug out from under those deluded by Satan's spell.

♦**Is it Friday yet?** When caught up in the busyness of life it is easy to end one day preoccupied with what will come the next. Often, that includes the ways in which we will get what we want or need. Maybe the grind of the job that pays the bills, the weight of running a business, the bureaucracy of receiving care, the work of raising the kids. We recoil when we hear God say, "Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds (Micah 2:1)!" This is not wickedness! God sees the world differently. He is discontent with those who "covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away (v2)." So-called reality is not the life of faith to which He calls us.

♦**Guilt by association:** Most of us are not in positions of ultimate power. We did not develop, nor do we control the systems that make us so busy. It is not our fault that others are enriched by our systems at the expense of others. *I'm not, so I must be innocent.* Yet God is angry with those who "oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance (v2)." He finds the cities guilty because "Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us.' Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins (Micah 3:11-12)." Permitting ourselves to be dependent upon so-called reality while pretending it is the life of faith provokes God.

II) Drop Everything...

Then there are the rare days our daily occupations do not have our attention. Unexpected, uncontrollable disruptions can put those in perspective. Disasters, tragedies, health scares. Suddenly, we put our lives on hold. Whether we acknowledge the fact or not, these are the reminders that we are not sovereign. God uses such occasions to break through so-called reality and demand our attention.

♦**Everything has changed:** Under normal conditions, we might feel trapped by our daily routine. It is the means of satisfying our needs and wants so we are faithful, dutiful, *committed* to it. We have all directly experienced or witnessed others break this commitment when a child, spouse, or parent is seriously unwell. The situation may feel forced upon us, but it reorients our lives regardless. "Therefore thus says the Lord: Now, I am devising against this family and evil from which you cannot remove your necks; and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time (Micah 2:3)." Having turned our dependence to so-

called reality and its promises, God allows it to have its way with us. We learn it has little power and no compassion when calamity occurs. Those plans that used to consume our attention seem totally irrelevant.

♦**It's all gone:** In our present system, such disasters can be ruinous. We put our faith in insurance, then find it severely limited when we need it most. Savings, retirements, home equity can disappear quickly paying for medical treatments that may not work. Years, decades of sacrifice and struggle now seem wasted. "We are utterly ruined; the Lord alters the inheritance of my people; how he removes it from me! Among our captors he parcels out our fields (v4)." We imagined He blessed us with our so-called reality. Now we perceive Him to be punishing us with it.

III) Second Chances...

Those who have come through such life-altering situations sometimes tell a different story. Survival appears a gift, one not to be taken for granted. They become intentionally grateful for each new day they get to share with their loved one. So-called reality never recaptures their devotion. No, the system is not escaped, but it is never again seen as the ultimate source of providence or security.

♦**Find out for myself:** Often, stories of tragedy are hopeful in that they become stories of second chances. Remission of cancer, recovery from surgery, successful medical interventions. These are such significant moments they can be perceived as fresh starts. Having experienced life flashing before one's eyes, the deception of so-called reality is exposed and the desire for a life of faith takes its place. It is not new information, it is the acceptance what we were told was true all along. "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise (Deut 6:6-7)." The deep sin of focusing on so-called reality is not that you and I personally plot some obvious evil – it is that we traded our life of faith for Satan's deception.

♦**Do over:** Let's rewrite our story as the life of faith. Blessed are those who pray gratitude to God for what He provided today. When the morning dawns, they tend to those in their community because He has given them joy. They delight in His abundance and share it. Seek the generosity of others and receive it. Serve others in their occupational capacity, grateful to God for the provision that comes with it. "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness... (Mt 6:33)."