

## Simple, Not Always Easy

**What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God** (Micah 6:8).

**Scripture:** Micah 6:1–8

**Song:** “He Has Shown Thee, O Man”

My daughter excitedly waved the paper that had arrived in the mail. Her ACT results showed that she qualified for a substantial college scholarship. She had worked hard at school, studying and taking practice tests, and it paid off!

Of course, our salvation cannot be earned or achieved through any effort of our own. However, as God’s people we are to diligently walk in His ways. As good students of God’s Word, we need attentive, focused hearts and minds that seek to “find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10). The prophet Micah boiled the list down to three things: acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

While this *sounds* simple, it can be challenging. For example, what if doing the right thing costs me more than I’m willing to give? Or what happens when the instruction in God’s Word runs contrary to my desires? While doing what pleases God can be difficult for us at times, He will give us all the grace and strength we need to succeed (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24).

**Father,** help me to act justly and mercifully even when it’s not easy. Help me show Your love through gracious actions, especially to those in need. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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March 1–2. **Cynthia Thomas** lives in southwest Missouri, where she enjoys writing about faith-based topics, local ministries, and veterans. She and her husband enjoy the outdoors and spending time with their adult children and three adorable grandchildren.

## Taking God's Holiness Seriously

**[God told Moses to say to the Israelites,] “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5).**

**Scripture:** Exodus 19:1–14

**Song:** “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!”

Fresh out of college, I really wanted a particular job. It paid well, offered good benefits, and had potential in the corporate world. I had limited experience, but I carefully crafted my résumé, dressed appropriately, and was hired. Once I started working, I realized the visibility of the position meant that I needed to maintain the standards of dress and etiquette that helped me get the job in the first place.

In today's passage, Israel was reminded that God had selected them as His special people, something not to be taken lightly. To prepare for the manifestation of God's presence, the people needed to wash themselves and observe the boundaries God designated. Then God would deliver His instruction about how to live as a people set apart for Him.

Because Jesus provided His own righteousness on our behalf, we can now draw near to God without the need for ceremonial cleansing. However, God's holiness hasn't changed. Romans 12:1 reminds us that we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. This means that our choices matter: the words we speak, what we watch and listen to, and how we go about our relationships. As we follow the leading of God's indwelling Spirit, He will guide our decisions and teach us God's holy ways.

**Father,** I embrace Your call to be set apart as I live to serve You and make You known today. In Jesus' name, amen.

## False Gods

[God told Ezekiel,] “Say to the people of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!’” (Ezekiel 14:6).

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 14:1–11

**Song:** “O for a Closer Walk with God”

I am blessed that my work has enabled me to travel internationally. Experiencing the richness of human culture provides a beautiful glimpse into what the gathering of all nations will be like. However, one of the heartbreaking aspects of spending time abroad is witnessing large numbers of people worshipping other gods. In a few instances, I have watched people prostrate themselves before physical idols, looking to them for help.

Today’s passage hits upon a familiar theme in Scripture: God consistently calls upon His people to turn away from idolatry. Time and again, rather than turning to the living God, the people looked to images made by human hands to provide help, or to meet some need. God calls this practice detestable.

Western culture offers a plethora of enticements that can lead our hearts away from God. We should examine ourselves to see whether there is anything we are looking to as our source of help or to fulfill our needs instead of the Lord. As we identify these metaphorical idols, we can then seek help from the Lord and accountability from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Father**, please fill me with courage to shun everything in society that draws me away from You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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March 3–9. **Troy D. Stuart** is married and has three sons. He has worked in Christian ministry and internationally as a Christian educator.

## Welcoming God's Tests

**Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness** (Psalm 26:2–3).

**Scripture:** Psalm 26

**Song:** “Lord, You Have Searched Me”

Test anxiety is a common experience for students. I have seen this phenomenon in third graders, high schoolers, and university seniors alike. Exams are a means of accountability: they reveal what we know (or don't know) about a subject. At times, even the best-prepared students are sweating it when they face a standardized test that will determine whether they can get into the academic program they're aspiring to.

David's words in today's psalm reveal no sign of test anxiety. In fact, David *asks* the Lord to examine him. The statement following his request is not an arrogant one; his confidence is not in the merit of his own righteousness. Instead, he can calmly ask the Lord to test and try him because he knows that he can rely on God's unfailing love and faithfulness in all things.

This psalm reinforces Scripture's consistent message about God's grace and faithfulness. Like David, we have shortcomings in our own lives. However, that is not how God evaluates us. His standard is whether we humbly trust His faithfulness and unfailing love.

**Father**, even as You search and test my heart today, thank You for the peace You give me in Christ. I trust that You are teaching me to walk in the kind of faith and humility that please You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Hydro Power

**The man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory** (Ezekiel 43:1–2).

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 43:1–12

**Song:** “God of Grace and God of Glory”

The majesty of a colossal waterfall is one of God’s great creative gifts to us. The roar of thousands of cubic feet of water cascading from hundreds of feet above is an awesome display of power. Almost nothing can beat the experience of standing in the presence of something so potent while a rainbow glimmers through the mist. Rarely does one get to observe such an intricate mix of beauty and strength.

Ezekiel had an experience even more remarkable than viewing a sublime waterfall when he beheld the glory of God. Standing at the temple’s east-facing gate in his vision, he heard a voice like rushing waters and saw the land become radiant. God gave Ezekiel this glimpse of His glory before giving him a message for the people. God’s instruction for the people to be holy was intricately connected to His own holy nature.

God wants our behavior to align with His teaching (Deuteronomy 10:12–13). However, our actions should always be rooted in our deep understanding of His nature. Contemplation of God’s holiness is foundational for our personal pursuit of a righteous life.

**Father**, thank You for revealing Your glory to me. May I grow in holiness as I contemplate Your beauty, majesty, and all Your wonderful works. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Suit Up!

**[God said,] “When [the Levitical priests] enter the gates of the inner court, they are to wear linen clothes. . . . They are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists”** (Ezekiel 44:17–18).

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 44:15–27

**Song:** “The Lord Our Righteousness”

Getting dressed for a football game is an event in itself. Get both ankles taped. Put on pants with thigh pads and knee pads. Lace up cleats. Buckle shoulder pads. Put on helmet, snap chin guard in place, and insert mouthpiece. As cumbersome as wearing all this equipment is, football players will tell you that each piece is important for participating in the game.

The clothing worn by Israel’s priests was an important part of their ministry before God. Each article—from linen tunic, to undergarment, to belt, to turban—had a specific function and purpose. The priests always had to be mindful of the clothes they wore when ministering before the Lord and also when ministering among the people.

As Christians, God does not require us to wear special garments in our daily lives as He commanded the priests of Israel to do. However, the Bible does tell us to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14). Whether we are in church or out, we can be as careful to dress ourselves in this manner as the priests who served in God’s temple were careful to dress in their holy attire.

**Father,** thank You for clothing me in Your Son’s righteousness. May everyone around me see Jesus through my words and actions. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## In Hindsight

**After [Jesus] was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22).**

**Scripture:** John 2:12–22

**Song:** “Christ Arose”

The Christian school I served at in Thailand would regularly take time to remember God’s faithfulness to the ministry. One story we often retold was about a time when the highway department tore down the buildings on our new campus so they could build a road for the city. It was through this challenging event that God showed himself strong and mighty on our behalf as He provided the means for us to build larger facilities, which ultimately allowed us to enroll more students.

As the story in today’s Scripture passage moves to its conclusion, Jesus makes an impossible-sounding statement: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19). The fact that Jesus was referring to His body and not a building would become clear to the disciples only after His resurrection.

Life with God requires us to grow comfortable with not knowing how everything will work out based on what we can see at the moment. It is often the case that we only understand what God was doing in a situation after the fact. Taking time to remember what God has done in the past can help us remain steadfast in our faith when we face trials in the present.

**Father,** I believe You raised Jesus from the dead. I know I can trust You in all things because nothing is impossible for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Source of Life

**The woman said to [Jesus], “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (John 4:15).**

**Scripture:** John 4:13–26

**Song:** “Fill My Cup, Lord”

We drink it, we wash with it, we clean with it. Water is a core element of our daily lives. Our own bodies are more than 50 percent water, and our planet cannot survive without it. During an average year a single city like Atlanta, Georgia, receives more than a hundred billion gallons of precipitation, an almost unbelievable amount, which allows life to thrive.

As Jesus often did, He used something familiar to our human experience to illustrate a vital spiritual truth. The woman at the well knew that access to a reliable water source was necessary for survival. What she had yet to grasp was that putting her faith in Jesus was even more fundamental to her well-being than access to all the clean drinking water in the world. What Jesus offers is a chance to experience spiritual transformation and a relationship with God the Father in a way she had never known before.

The woman in today’s passage had significant personal issues that may have brought her shame and scorn. Jesus did not shun her because of these things. Instead, He approached her directly with a word of hope. He comes to us with that same message, no matter what we may be experiencing.

**Father**, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, who quenches my spiritual thirst and gives me eternal life by His abundant grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.



## Rebuilt with Love

**The LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give” (Exodus 25:1–2).**

**Scripture:** Exodus 25:1–9; 26:1, 31–37

**Song:** “Make Me a Servant”

I was a minister in southern Louisiana when Hurricane Katrina destroyed our coastal cities. The loss of life and property was devastating to our communities. After the waters receded, thousands upon thousands of Christians from around the nation descended upon our state to help us rebuild our neighborhoods. Volunteers demucked houses and hauled off refuse too gross to describe. The sacrificial service of these believers was a testimony to the God of hope.

God directed Moses to build a tabernacle. This structure would be where God’s glory would dwell and where His priests would minister before Him. Building a tabernacle was no small undertaking. Yet, the people responded with generous hearts as they donated the textiles, animal skins, and precious metals needed for completing the project.

Sacrificial service done with a happy and generous spirit is a significant way to share God’s love with the world. Many people have come to the Lord after receiving assistance from God’s people. Our service is effective in touching other people’s hearts because we are motivated by Christ’s love and a desire for God to get all the glory.

**Father,** nothing I do will ever compare to how You served me by sending Jesus to the cross on my behalf. As I serve You joyfully, I pray You would bless those around me and bring glory to Your name. In Jesus’ name, amen.