

## **“Activists: Loving God through Seeking Justice”**

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Fourth in a Series *Loving God Many Ways*

Micah 6:1-8

January 18, 2015

Hear what the Lord is saying! Arise, lay out the lawsuit before the mountains; let the hills hear your voice! Hear, mountains, the lawsuit of the Lord! Hear, eternal foundations of the earth! The Lord has a lawsuit against his people; with Israel he will argue.

“My people, what did I ever do to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! I brought you up out of the land of Egypt; I redeemed you from the house of slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you. My people, remember what Moab’s King Balak had planned, and how Balaam, Beor’s son, answered him! Remember everything from Shittim to Gilgal, that you might learn to recognize the righteous acts of the Lord!”

With what should I approach the Lord and bow down before God on high? Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings, with year-old calves? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with many torrents of oil? Should I give my oldest child for my crime; the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?

He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:1-8

Contemporary English Version

When do you catch a glimpse of justice?

We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . a wrong is righted. We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . a wrongdoer and a victim are reconciled.

We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . hard work pays off. We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . creativity is celebrated.

We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . millions hold up signs saying “Je Suis Charlie.” And “Je Suis Ahmed.” (He was the Muslim police officer, executed by the terrorists.) And, “Je Suis Juif” after Jews were attacked.

We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . there is no need for such signs.

We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . the planet breathes deeply, and trees wave grandly, and all creation smiles contented. We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . tables are full and abundance shared, water is clean and thirst quenched. We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . there is a big party, and everyone is wanted, and invited, and welcomed.

We catch a glimpse of justice when . . . we experience the heartbeat of God.

## II

If we are going to follow Jesus, we have to embrace his love for justice. It's not an option! Jesus is bringing to life the fullness of God' shalom peace. Peace can only be, where there is justice.

Jesus calls all of us to this. And some among us, he really fires up!

In the fall, we began celebrating different ways we love God. Gary Thomas calls these "Spiritual Pathways." I've listed them in your Sunday News.<sup>1</sup>

Caregivers  
Traditionalists  
Activists  
Contemplatives  
Ascetics  
Enthusiasts  
Intellectuals  
Naturalists  
Sensates

Each of us will be drawn to some pathways more than others. At the back of the sanctuary, you'll find a short questionnaire that can help you clarify your pathways.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Thomas, Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God revised edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010). Here are short definitions of each.

**Caregivers** love God by caring for others.

**Traditionalists** love God with our ancestors.

**Activists** love God by confronting injustice.

**Contemplatives** love God through adoration.

**Ascetics** love God in solitude and simplicity.

**Enthusiasts** love God by engaging mystery and celebration.

**Intellectuals** love God with their minds.

**Naturalists** love God outdoors.

**Sensates** love God by engaging their senses.

I've changed the order Thomas presents them, to fit my planned order for this series.

For some, a primary way they love God is through seeking justice. Today is about these “Activists.” They are drawn to speak openly and clearly about what God is for. And to speak openly and clearly about what God is against.<sup>2</sup> Activists are prophetic like Micah, whom we heard from today.

### III

Micah sets it up like a courtroom. God is suing God’s People for breach of covenant. For the jury, God calls the heights of mountains and depths of earth. God presents the evidence. God has gone beyond the call of duty: bringing Israel out of slavery, calling up Moses, Miriam and Aaron to lead them, thwarting the schemes of enemies like Balak and Balaam, and leading them into the land of promise. It was all God’s gift, pure and abundant and joyful grace, from the Lord for God’s People.

How did they say thanks? They played around at religion, instead of living faithfully with God. They built a government, an economy, a military, a society like everyone else’s, when they were made to live God’s ways. You know about income inequality, and spending scandals, and family breakdown.<sup>3</sup> These did not start with us! They had those problems in spades.

What can we do then, to say thanks to God? They give a list of increasingly spectacular and sacrificial gifts, hoping to settle the case before the verdict.

“You know what God wants,” says the prophet. “Do justice. Love with kindness. Walk with God, humbly.”

Justice is when everything is in place, to make community flourish and lives rejoice. With eyes opened by God, Micah the prophet looked around, and prophets today look around, and see so much injustice.

Activists chase after justice for their love of God.

### IV

Of course, when you’re chasing something, you can easily stumble. As with all the spiritual pathways, Activists face pitfalls. Let me give you three which Activists need to watch out for.

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<sup>2</sup> Scot McKnight, One Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 59).

<sup>3</sup> All problems Micah names.

First, we can become so focused on fighting what is wrong, we miss seeing what is right. Activists can have a hard time celebrating victories, because we get so used to the battle.

For instance, global poverty is a huge barrier to shalom. Do you know how fast the proportion of the world's people living in extreme poverty is growing? . . . . It isn't. It is dropping. In the past thirty years, it has dropped from 52% to 21%.<sup>4</sup> That's still a lot of people. Nonetheless, the improvement has been remarkable. Are you surprised? Most Americans don't know this; I expect it's the same for Canadians. Two out of three believe poverty is getting worse, not better. They see all the effort expended, and think there has been no change. So they despair that poverty won't end. When you see no hope for justice, you risk giving up. Injustice should lead us to weep and rage. But we need celebration too; it fuels our hope.

Another pitfall for activists. We can become judgmental toward those who don't share our passion, or our position. Why aren't others fired up like we are? What's wrong with those who disagree with us? Even when we are in sync about what we want to accomplish, such as ending poverty, we might disagree about how best to go about it. We are tempted to divide "right-thinkers" from "wrong-thinkers," and see our opponents harshly.

When Micah said what God wants, remember he listed three things. Yes, do justice. But remember the second: love kindness. Seeking justice cannot be an excuse for hardness of heart.

A third pitfall is thinking it is up to us. Activists are primed to make a difference. What keeps us going is the belief that somehow we can. That's what keeps us at it. We can make a difference. We *must* make a difference.

What's the third thing Micah tells us God wants? Seek justice. Love kindness. And . . . walk humbly. Humbly. Even when we're sure we're right, we might be wrong. Humbly. Our best efforts will often bear little fruit. And the thing that we are half-hearted about might yield the greatest harvest. Humbly. It's not all up to us. Go make a difference. But humbly. Because you know it is God working through you who makes the difference.

## V

If "Activism" is one of your spiritual pathways, how can you grow and nurture your spirit

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<sup>4</sup> The data in this paragraph comes from "Global Poverty Is on the Decline, But Almost No One Believes It" by the Barna Group (April 29, 2014).  
[www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/668-global-poverty-is-on-the-decline-but-almost-no-one-believes-it](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/668-global-poverty-is-on-the-decline-but-almost-no-one-believes-it)

through it?

Thomas Merton was a monk, a mystic, and an activist for peace and justice. Merton suggested that Activists are blessed when they are nourished in their relationship with God, not despite their activism, but through their activism. He wrote this:

*There are many Christians who serve God with great purity of soul and perfect self-sacrifice in the active life. Their vocation does not allow them to find the solitude and silence and leisure in which to empty minds entirely of created things and to lose themselves in God alone. They are too busy serving him in his children on earth. . . .*

*Nevertheless they know how to find God by devoting themselves to him in self-sacrificing labors in which they are able to remain in his presence all day long. . . . they are hidden contemplatives because of their great purity of heart maintained in them by obedience, fraternal charity, self-sacrifice and perfect abandonment to God's will in all they do and suffer. They are much closer to God than they realize.*<sup>5</sup>

If you are an Activist, you can grow spiritually through your letter-writing, your protesting, your researching and advocating, your fundraising and awareness-raising. You can grow when you give it all as offerings to God. When you give it prayerfully, humbly, and joyfully. When you remember that your Activism is a spiritual pathway, a way to love God whose heart burns for justice.

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Merton, The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 63-64. Quoted in Thomas, 136.