

God Has Shown You What to Do.
Micah 1:1-5
July 27, 2025

How many of you had a VCR back in the day?

How many of you were able to figure out how to program it?

How many of you read the entire owner's manual?

That's the thing. For some reason, owner's manuals, user agreements, even complicated assembly diagrams – we hate being told what to do! With a few exceptions (all of whom apparently go to this church!), manuals are something that we collect, never to be read.

That is a simple, inconsequential example, but following the instructions can have life and death consequences!

Consider the Ford Pinto. Manufactured between 1971 and 1980, pre-release tests done by Ford showed that the vehicle had a remarkable defect – it would likely explode into flames in rear-end collisions. This was due to a fuel tank defect that could be solved at a cost of \$11 per fix.

Influenced by moving targets for safety regulations, and a cost-benefit analysis that concluded repairs were likely to outweigh litigation costs, the faulty design went into production.

And their customers paid the consequences.

I have found going through Minor Prophets to be both hugely challenging, and extremely invigorating. The last two weeks have been focusing us on our need to forgive, as well as to be forgiven. Micah is a subtle shift. Micah distills his message into a very, very short to do list.

We read in Micah 1:

The LORD gave this message to Micah of Moresheth during the years when Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah. The visions he saw concerned both Samaria and Jerusalem.

Attention! Let all the people of the world listen!
Let the earth and everything in it hear.

Micah is about to publicly denounce Israel as a warning to the nations around her. And to us! In this short scroll, we learn that God has shown people how to assemble a life, and we ignore those instructions to our peril. If God disciplines Israel for going her own way instead of his, this puts the rest of us on notice: Follow Israel's disobedience, suffer Israel's consequences. And the opposite is also true: Follow Israel's instructions, experience Israel's blessing!

Micah is concerned with three main failings. Each of these instructions are clear in the Law.

Laws against buying land:

Leviticus 25:14, 23-24: When you make an agreement with your neighbor to buy or sell property, you must not take advantage of each other. The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me. With every purchase of land you must grant the seller the right to buy it back.

Laws against bribery and corruption.

Deuteronomy 16:19 says, "You must never twist justice or show partiality. Never accept a bribe, for bribes blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the decisions of the godly.

Laws against treating demographics differently.

Leviticus 19:33-34: "Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 24:22: You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native born. I am the LORD your God.

Following these instructions, all 613 of them, gives good results: long stewardship of the land promised to them.

But not following the instructions brings disaster!

Leviticus 18:26-28: But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the foreigners residing among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

The amazing gift of the law given to Israel was that the people never had to guess how to appease the gods – they had the instruction manual! All they needed to do was read it, and live according to it.

Like most other instruction manuals, though, Israel doesn't follow God's law. And this is the basis of the case against them.

Micah 2:1-2

What sorrow awaits you who lie awake at night,
thinking up evil plans.
You rise at dawn and hurry to carry them out,

simply because you have the power to do so.
When you want a piece of land,
you find a way to seize it.
When you want someone's house,
you take it by fraud and violence.
You cheat a man of his property,
stealing his family's inheritance.

The days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were marked by a growing wealth gap between the urban elites and the rural poor. Within that prosperity, a glaring miscarriage of justice was taking root. In contrast to the Law, land was being accumulated by a few at the expense of the many. Removing a family's land not only took their shelter, it took their security, and their share of the covenant promise God had given them.

The wealthy would buy up the homes of their neighbours, taking advantage of financial distress. They would then use that wealth to accumulate even more. Sounds familiar.

Micah 3:9-11a

Listen to me, you leaders of Israel!
You hate justice and twist all that is right.
You are building Jerusalem
on a foundation of murder and corruption.
You rulers make decisions based on bribes;
you priests teach God's laws only for a price;
you prophets won't prophesy unless you are paid.
Yet all of you claim to depend on the LORD.

Some of the power of the wealthy in Micah's time came through purchased leadership. First, decisions were made by landowners, so buying land also bought decision making power.¹ Bribes, gifts, or the social influence that comes with major economic status, were being used to shape judgements and policies to benefit the rich over the poor. From special interest or corporate lobby groups to outright bribery, this again sounds all too familiar!

Israel is guilty, and as the nations watching the trial, we should be sweating because the biggest issue that God has with Israel is that, rather than being a contrast of God's goodness, Israel was no different from her pagan neighbours. This raises the question: Will the watching nations learn from Israel's failure?

¹ IVPBCOT

If this is the grief, where is the hope?

Look at what following the instructions does.

Micah 4:1-5

In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's house
will be the highest of all—
the most important place on earth.
It will be raised above the other hills,
and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.
People from many nations will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of Jacob's God.
There he will teach us his ways,
and we will walk in his paths."

The temple of God was intended to be a place where anyone, Jew or Gentile, could come and learn truth, and justice. Jesus reflects this when he clears the temple and quotes Isaiah, a contemporary of Micah, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. . ." ² God redeems the nationalist sentiment by opening the way to him to all nations through Jesus.

For the LORD's teaching will go out from Zion;
his word will go out from Jerusalem.

The kingdom of God was never intended to be held to one people. The commission that Jesus gives his disciples begins to fulfill this prophecy, of which we are fruit! ". . . you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ³

The LORD will mediate between peoples
and will settle disputes between strong nations far away.

This resets the corruption of leadership where legal decisions are bought by the rich, and deny justice to the poor (Micah 3:9-11).

In his interaction with the Samaritan woman, Jesus shows that the worship of God is not tied to one specific location, land, or temple. The justice of God's Kingdom is available to all, wherever they are.

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now

² Mark 11:17, Isaiah 56:7

³ Acts 1:8.

come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.⁴

They will hammer their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will no longer fight against nation,
nor train for war anymore.
Everyone will live in peace and prosperity,
enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees,
for there will be nothing to fear.
The LORD of Heaven's Armies
has made this promise!
Though the nations around us follow their idols,
we will follow the LORD our God forever and ever.

The end result of following the instructions is a peace established by God's authority and power, and every person having what they need not only for survival, but for the good life!

Micah 4 shows us what will be, and what we could participate in. How, you ask?
Surely by correct theology. Or by consistent church attendance. Or by huge donations.

Or not.

Micah 6:6-8

What can we bring to the LORD?
Should we bring him burnt offerings?
Should we bow before God Most High
with offerings of yearling calves?
Should we offer him thousands of rams
and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Should we sacrifice our firstborn children
to pay for our sins?
No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.

Religious services and rituals are not what God is looking for. Rather, he is looking for a life lived according to the instruction manual. And when the 613-step manual turned out to be too complicated, he summarized it for Israel here in verse 8. We know injustice when we see it, just

⁴ John 4:21-23.

like we instinctively recognize who behaved like a neighbour in the parable of the Good Samaritan. How do we respond? How do we move through life?

Step 1: Do justly.

Author Julie Clawson, in her 2009 book, *Every Day Justice*, writes, “Acting justly every day means developing awareness about the problems in the world; it means changing how we shop, how we dress and how we drive; it means starting to see our each and every action as an ethical choice.”⁵

She continues, “If we respect the image of God in all people, then we need to not only heal the ways that image has been marred in the victims of injustice, we need to also heal the ways the image of God is marred in the perpetrators of injustice. The true practice of justice thus moves away from retribution (punishment) and toward restoration. We restore broken relationships, we restore families torn asunder, and we even restore damaged land so that life may survive and flourish. To live justly in our own lives means living so that this restoration can happen. Justice, understood exclusively in terms of punishment, involves tearing people down, but justice, understood as righteousness and restoration, results in helping people rebuild—both perpetrators and victims.”⁶

The first step in God’s instruction manual is to stop being complicit in injustice.

In simple terms, I think that this means that we do not make things worse for those with whom we interact. The medical profession takes a famous oath called the Hippocratic Oath, which says in part, “I will do no harm or injustice to [my patients].” Do my decisions, choices, or priorities make life harder for anyone that they touch? For the producers of our foods and clothes? Our entertainments? Those outside our borders, as well as in them?

This week, look at one decision that you make regularly, and take an inventory of how the entire stream, from production to distribution, from economic benefit and cost to health benefit and cost.

This leads us to step 2.

We are to love mercy. Again, in simple terms, I think that this means we act to improve the circumstances of those with whom we interact. Mercy lifts people up beyond their circumstances and consequences. Mercy restores the dignity of those around us. Consider, are my decisions, choices, or priorities good news for anyone that they touch?

Finally, step 3.

⁵ Clawson, Julie, *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of Our Daily Choices*, IVP, 2009, p. 14.

⁶ Clawson, p. 23.

We are to walk humbly with God. In simple terms, look for what God is doing. This is righteousness. This is justice and mercy. Do the same thing!

There is another point to walking humbly with God. Living up to this is a God sized task, not a human sized one.

Returning to Julie Clawson, the first two words in her book are, “**Don’t panic.**” Tweak, don’t overhaul. Commit to making one change and sticking with it. Become aware of the next way to live justly and mercifully, rather than trying for all ways at once!

Our world is, indeed, full of injustice, and un-mercy. But all is not lost, because God has filled and equipped his church to respond with justice and mercy. Even when we, the church, fall down, there is hope, because the end of the story is ultimately not up to us. The end of Micah is also a fitting end for us today.

Micah 7:18-20

Where is another God like you,
 who pardons the guilt of the remnant,
 overlooking the sins of his special people?
You will not stay angry with your people forever,
 because you delight in showing unfailing love.
Once again you will have compassion on us.
 You will trample our sins under your feet
 and throw them into the depths of the ocean!
You will show us your faithfulness and unfailing love
 as you promised to our ancestors Abraham and Jacob long ago.