

SCRIPTURE  
PASSAGES  
THAT  
*changed*  
MY  
LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES FROM THE WRITERS OF

*Living***Faith**



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One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200  
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(860) 437-3012 or (800) 321-0411  
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## Introduction

The title of this book, *Scripture Passages That Changed My Life*, could be misleading. The reason being, as strictly a matter of fact, the verses themselves didn't change the lives of the authors. Their lives were changed because they chose to receive the words that were put before them. They chose to act upon them because the word of God penetrated their heart and soul.

This is not merely a matter of semantics. God is amazingly good to us in granting us the gift of free will. Our free will determines our thinking and our behavior. God is kind and patient, knowing full well that we, unfortunately, often choose to stray.

Maybe a more accurate description of the stories that follow would be, "How I Chose to *Allow* These Scripture Passages to Change My Life"! And by choosing what we read, we place our trust in an author, allowing them to lead us places.

The ten *Living Faith* authors featured in this book have related their very personal and moving experiences with the word of God on the pages that follow. We are confident that by choosing to read these essays, your trust in the authors will be rewarded. We further hope that these writings will bring you closer to the author of all life, our loving God. May you be enriched and strengthened by the inspiring words that you will find on the following pages. They just might change your life—if you let them.

**TERENCE HEGARTY**, *editor*

# Micah 6:8

*You have been told,  
O mortal, what is good,  
and what the Lord  
requires of you:  
Only to do justice  
and to love goodness,  
and to walk humbly  
with your God.*

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## ONLY THIS

*by* **Chris Koellhoffer, IHM**

One of my earliest memories of an encounter with God came when I was five years old. Can one experience a mystic moment at that tender age? I believe so, for children have a way of getting right to the heart of things. Children have a purity of vision unobstructed by cynicism or by the jaded sense of having already experienced all there is to see.

Our family lived in the suburbs of New Jersey, surrounded by our cherished friends in the plant and animal worlds, at a time when there was minimal artificial lighting. Sometimes, in the early hours past midnight, our dad would shake us awake, wrap us in blankets and carry us out to the deck on the second floor. From that vantage point, we could glance down at the darkened homes in the valley below. Even better, we could gaze upward at a night sky brilliant with stars. While still rubbing sleep from our eyes, we would rest there, silenced by the immensity looking back at us. We simply basked in wonder and awe in the hush of the evening. We felt the inadequacy of words but intuited that we were in the presence of the Holy.

Dad told us that our names were written in the heavens. I was just learning to read, but with serious squinting, I was so sure I could find the stars that spelled “Chris.” A thousand astronomers could not

have convinced me otherwise. What we experienced on those still nights was a palpable sense of a universe that was beyond our understanding and, at the same time, alive with the presence of a Creator who felt incredibly close, familiar, and intimate. In those formative years, the path to the Holy seemed amazingly simple and straightforward. Open your ears, open your eyes, open your heart. Listen and pay attention to Holy Mystery at work in the world.

And then, I became a sophisticated teenager, at least in my own estimation. In high school and as a young adult, I was caught up in a self-imposed notion of perfection, as if everything depended on me. As if perfection were what God was expecting of me. No, *demanding* of me. Living with that naïve, youthful perspective, I was doomed to failure, given the flaws and limits of the human condition. Only very slowly did I grow into an understanding of spirituality and of what it was that God truly desired of me and for me. I consider it grace that, at some point when I was struggling to live out of my misinformed concept of God's expectations, I bumped up against the words of the prophet Micah. These words seemed to leap off the page and straight into my heart:

You have been told, O mortal, what is good,  
and what the Lord requires of you:

Only to do justice and to love goodness,  
and to walk humbly with your God.

MICAH 6:8

Those words both intrigued and disturbed me. They became a catalyst of sorts, propelling me forward into a more tender, less judgmental direction. Micah's wisdom reoriented me and, like the stars, nudged me to navigate the universe with fresh thinking. My carefully crafted path to God, a path where I once thought every step must be calculated and measured, was crumbling under my feet. Was it possible that the spiritual life was a lot simpler—although not easier—than I had ever imagined? Micah's words suggested that my emphasis had been misplaced, for the path to the Holy, clearly, wasn't about only me and my solitary efforts. It wasn't about how perfectly I could offer sacrifice or recite a lengthy list of prayers. It was about right relationship with God, with others, with myself. It was much more about discovering who God was and who I was in relationship to the Divine and all of creation. It was about how the Holy longed to live and act in me and through me and how I was cooperating with grace.

I sat with the question, *Just what does God desire of me?* and broke open the prophet's reply: "Only this: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our

God.” *Only* this! It sounds so simple, so straightforward, as clear as sitting in contemplation in the middle of the night and drinking in the stars. Simple, yes; easy, no! The work of a lifetime.

Micah underscores that a loving God has shared with us, in words plain and clear, how to live, how to be, how to move forward as a loving person committed to help bring about the fullness of life God dreams for each of us. As the prophet noted in the passage preceding Micah 6:8, our lives are not about rooting around for the perfect gift or looking to appease a distant deity as we try to ward off divine judgment. It’s about the invitation to reflect on right relationship between ourselves and others, between the Divine and our very human hearts; the invitation to be fair and just in our attitudes and our actions; the invitation to cultivate tender and compassionate hearts, especially toward those who are most fragile and vulnerable. And at times that may be us.

#### **TO DO JUSTICE**

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The profoundly spiritual late nights of childhood stargazing prepared me for a stretching of my worldview as time moved on. After all, the same brilliant stars that looked down, as a five-year-old in suburban New Jersey was contemplating the night sky, also shed

their light extravagantly in other corners of our world. Those same stars could connect to the laborer in a sweatshop, to the farmer harvesting rice in a paddy, to the girl child trafficked, separated, and cut off from hope, to the single parent struggling, paycheck to paycheck, to put food on the table.

Micah's words remind us that every event and experience of our lives takes place in the arena of justice, where nothing—no word, no attitude, no action—is without consequence. Where and how we spend our time indicates our priorities. What we choose to buy or listen to or companion is telling of what we value most. Micah calls us to live with a deepening consciousness of our place in the Earth community and of how our words and actions have both a local and a global impact.

#### **TO LOVE GOODNESS**

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To be spiritual is to be open to amazement. Hopefully, we have had many experiences—like my childhood starwatch—that astonish and stun us, that suddenly and immediately expand our borders and defy easy description or categorization. We may witness in others a largeness of heart that haunts us, that shakes us awake, that simply will not let us go. We may be overwhelmed and deeply touched by those who, day

in and day out, give their lives over with extraordinary and extravagant love, contributing to the fulfillment of God's dream of abundant life for all people.

Often, an experience of beauty or a bumping into wonder is an invitation for that kind of illumination. The beautiful as a reflection of divinity calls us out of ourselves. It upends the seeming ordinariness of human experience and challenges us to live fully awake and aware of God at work in our world. In experiencing goodness and beauty, we're called to admire and resonate with the artist struggling to put paint to canvas or to bring words to life or to transform sounds into haunting melody.

#### **TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD**

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My own heart has been broken open and tenderized by walking humbly in the company of the holy ones who reveal the face of God. I have met them in Chatham, in the South Bronx, in Scranton, in San Salvador, and in Port-au-Prince. I have met them in Lima and Mexico City and every place in our world where my feet and God's grace have taken me. These holy ones have welcomed me into cardboard shacks, into tents, classrooms, kitchens, and pews. I have been graced to be with them in their art studios and circles of prayer. They have forgiven my ignorance and immersed me

in cultures not my own. They have invited me into a profound solidarity as I have learned their names and their stories, as they have appreciated mine. They have inspired me to “waste” time on what really matters. They are bearers of wisdom, extraordinary teachers who have spurred me to walk on the two feet of justice—charity and advocacy—and to pay attention to the signs of the times, God’s unfolding revelation.

For myself, and for all people in our beautiful, yet wounded world, this is my prayer:

*With God’s grace,  
may we always move forward together  
doing justice,  
loving goodness,  
and walking humbly with our God.*