

**A Grace Gathering
18 January 2026**

The New Year; 2026

We have crossed the threshold of a year and look forward to new beginnings as well as the continuation of ones. We have some strange traditions inherited from our Irish heritage (placing of quarters outside on new years eve and rolling them in the next morning implying that money will keep rolling in throughout the year. Another is having the darkest hair person in the neighborhood enter your home (symbolic of harmony and blessing in the coming year).

Beyond the tradition, there the expression of help and blessing in the coming year. What will transpire in 2026 is not an easy or answerable issue. When it comes to particulars about our lives, I cannot tell you what is ahead. There will be good and bad decisions, wonderfully astute choices and some abominable blunders, great joys and severe disappointments. That is just plain life.

So how can I talk to you about what's next? How are we to navigate through 2026? There are a few timeless principles that you can take with you wherever you journey in life. Principles that will spare you, protect you, bring you great joy, and end your days with fewer regrets.

The texts I have chosen for this occasion are Deuteronomy 10:12 and Micah 6:8

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God *require* from you, but to fear the Lord your God to walk in all his ways and love him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut. 10:12).”

“He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD *require* of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).”

The occasion of the comment by Moses goes something like this. Moses is now a super-senior citizen in his 120th year. His father, Amram, and his mother, Jochebed, have passed from the scene, and he has occupied himself for four decades leading a people who proved to be immensely blessed of the

Lord but paid a very high cost for their derelictions. They now stand poised for the greatest adventure of their lives. They have traversed a wilderness and now stand on the brink of a totally new experience (an analogy can be drawn between the ancient people and us). The desert is behind you, at least for now, and new horizons are before you. There are lands before you to conquer filled with strange inhabitants, with perverse customs, and odd values.

The second passage casts us forward some eight centuries into the dark days of the decline of the kingdom of Judea. The prophet Micah, a Judean and contemporary of Isaiah, lived in the era of Assyria's ascension as the world's first great world power, the tragedy of the collapse of the Northern Kingdom and the aborted conquest of the Southern Kingdom. His messages address the dereliction of the Southern kingdom, impending judgement, and promise of restoration.

The question before us is this, how do you navigate from this point. Where can we find insight to help us along in 2026? The answer is found in the two verses I have selected for today. In Moses' writings found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, he functions as a leader receiving instruction from God and directing God's people; in Deuteronomy, he is a thundering preacher and prophet. That book is largely composed of sermon material; it consists of four lengthy sermons. In those sermons, he strives to get the people to think about what is most important; he challenges a new generation to pursue faithfulness as a colossal new set of circumstances is about to unfold.

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“He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God.

Both texts are moral exhortations; they are timeless because they reveal our essential duty among the many important, but lesser, duties of life. In fact, the exhortations are the foundation of decision-making for all of us. It is our ultimate duty that makes sense of all the lesser duties and responsibilities of life.

1. *The text is plain: “And now, O Israel, this is what the Lord requires of you.”* “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you.”

As Christians, we are bound to a unique set of values and priorities. We all have found by the grace of God a new, wonderful master, the Lord Jesus who is the Christ. A savior that sought us out, bought us out of sin and shame, and set us on a new path. That manifestation of amazing love has created in each of us a desire to listen to him, follow him, and obey him.

It is important to know what he requires of us. God does demand something of you and me. What God requires rises above any vocation because it is to characterize us in whatever vocation we choose. It rises above all professions, because it is how every life is to be conducted. Whatever you do in the marketplace, your calling is not to a particular career. It is about something far more important than career, though career is the outward shell. Who you really are has to do with character, not performance!

Webster defines “require” this way: “to ask or insist upon as by right or authority. God has a right to “require” because of who he is. He alone has all authority; he alone possesses all-power, all-wisdom, and all-knowledge. Simply stated, he has a right to demand.

2. *But what does He require of us? What does he demand of us? Does he require your happiness leaving you haggard and marginalized? Does he require a life sapped of all joy? Does he require your wallet? He requires something far more important than all these. What can that be?*

The verbs in the verse describe what God demands of His children. Here, there are four of them: fear, walk, love, and serve. Two focus upon internal, emotional attitudes and two upon the outward manifestation of those internal attitudes in outward, moral behavior.

a. *Fear.* Are we to cringe before him as an abused animal or frightened child facing a tyrant? Is he a harsh, unbending, grim taskmaster who motivates with compassionless power and threat? The word fear is frequently translated “reverence” or “reverential awe”. Throughout all the days of your life, God requires that He be honored in all our choices, attitudes, and behaviors. That is biblical fear; it is a depth of respect that encompasses an emotional allegiance to the Lord as our priority in all our choices.

b. *Walk*: Another translation of this word is the phrase “to observe his commandments”. You never have to concern yourself with ignorance of the will of God because God’s will be found in the imperative mood of Scripture, His commands. God’s will in Scripture is not so much a place or a function in a place; it is character. I urge you to focus on character-development throughout your life because that is the emphasis of Scripture. When you do that, all other things will fall into place.

c. *Love*: Fear and love are attitudes; they are sides of the same coin. Fear is respect; love is adoration. It is delight in the object of one’s love. What do the Scriptures say, but “delight thyself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart?” The path to a fulfilling life begins with affectionate devotion to God.

d. *Serve*: Service is a facet of obedience as is walk. The issue here is not on a particular task; it is upon an attitude that must characterize us at the deepest motivational level.

Micah expresses the duties God has set before us with different terms though the essence of the exhortations is much the same. He begins affirming that there is such moral action that God defines as “good”. He, then, defines what he means with a three-fold description.

- a. He begins stating that the instructions are “good.”
- b. “Do justice” means to act in a righteous manner. The point is that our words are one thing, but conduct is the litmus test. It means “to treat people fairly.”
- c. “Love mercy” is a translation of the great Hebrew word *hesed*; it suggests faithful, covenant love. We are to love people faithfully.
- d. “Walk humbly” deals with moral conduct and is delineated by the adverb “humbly.” The term is not the normal word for humility and should be rendered “be careful to live the way God want you to.”

3. *Who are we to fear, walk (after), love, and serve?*

The great God of Israel, the one who gave us his own dear son, the savior of the world, the one who sits above the circle of the earth in resplendent glory and power we are to fear, walk after, love, and serve. He alone is the one to whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket, our lives a passing vapor on a coolish morn. The one to whom you shall bow someday to give an account of your life.

4. *In what manner are we to fear, walk (after), love, and serve?*

“With all your *heart*, with all your *soul*,” states our text. The heart is the center of our immaterial nature; it encompasses our affections. The affections, what we like or dislike, embrace or abhor, is the mechanism of choice making. It is what excites the will to action. It determines behavior. Our deepest affections are to be reserved for the Lord alone. He demands unstinting, unremitting love from our inner most being. This is what the Lord requires of you.

Thoughts

1. Without love, holiness of heart, and righteousness of life, flowing from faith in Christ, all our churchgoings, forms of prayer, and almsgivings profit us nothing.
2. The piety that God approves consists of three elements: a strict adherence to that which is equitable in all dealings with others; a heart determined to do them good; and diligent care to live in close and intimate fellowship with God.
3. A good look at the past use of God’s loyalty, and of our responsibility to be loyal to him in return.
4. The hardest lesson for me is that it is easy to confuse activity with what brings glory and honor to the Lord Jesus. God’s primary interest for us is character building that should flow into reflective activities. The error is stark: it is wrong to believe that God’s blessing rests on activities rather than character. You and I in our life are called upon to reflect the character of God. Does God see Himself in the choices we make? Does the mirror of our lives reflect of God’s character or is our mirror tarnished by ignorance of God’s priorities? Do we think that religious duty is how we bless God when? In reality; our lives are a conduit, a position, a platform, wherein we show forth the character of the one who loved us and gave Himself up for us!