

# Micah: God's Requirements

## by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

### Prayer of Illumination

Prepare our hearts, O God, to hear your Word and obey your will.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### Background

I've always been fascinated by people in history who were able to elegantly describe complex realities in simple, yet profound ways. To boil down and put these truths in a nutshell takes countless hours of reflection, preparation, observation, failure, and revision.

#### Like in the realm of Math and Science:

- The Pythagorean Theorem: the square of the [hypotenuse](#) is equal to the sum of the squares of the [other two sides](#).
- Einstein's theory of general relativity:  $E=mc^2$

#### Documents in American History:

- Like The Declaration of Independence: 1458 words long
- Gettysburg Address: 272 words

#### World Religions:

- 4 Noble Truths in Buddhism
- 5 Pillars of Islam

#### In our Judeo-Christian faith tradition:

- The 10 Commandments
- The 8 Beatitudes of Christ
- The Lord's Prayer
- Great Commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.
- Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated.

The ancient Rabbis said of all the prophets, *Micah* did the best job of summarizing the heart of all the hundreds of God's commandments given to Moses.

**Micah 6:8 is the Golden Rule of the Old Testament.**

In just three short phrases Micah sums up the legal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of faith and practice: **Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God.**

Let's step back a little bit and take a look at the prophet Micah and his message.

Micah's name means: "*who is like the Lord?*"

Micah came from rural roots and hailed from the small town of Moresheth in Judah, which was near the Philistine border and about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. It was likely that Micah knew the Prophet Isaiah—they were contemporaries. So this was before the exile.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the looming and menacing Assyrian army was slowly making their way towards Jerusalem. But not all was well within Israel either. Morals were lax, business dealings were shady, the government was decadent, the courts and religious institutions were corrupt.

*Things don't change much, do they?*

Micah was an astute observer and critic of the political, social, and spiritual ills of his day. With vivid imagery he reminded his people how far they'd fallen and that they'd forgotten their story and their identity. Unlike the slick TV prophets of the day, Micah said that Jerusalem would be destroyed. The masses didn't like this negative message, so his book didn't initially make it on the Jerusalem Times Bestseller List. Yet Micah remained true to God on his lonesome path:

The best of them is like a brier and the most upright of them a thorn hedge. [\(7:4\)](#) . . . *But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. [\(7:7\)](#) When I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. [\(7:8\)](#)*

This is the gospel according to Micah: There's promise in the midst of the peril.

Reading Micah is a little like watching a close tennis match—between **judgment and hope**. There are volleys back and forth between **present duress** and **future deliverance**. At one moment, the advantage seemed to be with **despair**, only with **hope** to rally back. **Humiliation** seemed to be a shoo-in for victory, but then **redemption** won the tie-breaker.

At the end of the day, Micah gives us hope—even in the midst of the wreckage with these beautiful words:

**God will hurl his people's sin *into the depths of the sea.*** [\(7:19\)](#)

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## Scripture: Micah 6:6-8

"With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"  
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – Micah: God's Requirements

Social psychologist Roy Baumeister did significant research on what gives human beings meaning in life. He argued that four fundamental questions needed to be addressed in our quest for meaning:

- The question of **Identity**: *Who am I?*
- The question of **Value**: *Do I matter?*
- The question of **Purpose**: *Why am I here?*
- The question of **Agency**: *Can I make a difference?*

While gazing at the stars, French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal pondered these questions:

*When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in eternity before and after, the little space which I fill...I am frightened.... Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and this time been allotted to me?*

Behind these questions is a yearning that we human beings have:

- We want to see the big picture of things.
- To discover patterns and connect the dots.
- To get a sense how we're a part of a bigger story.
- To see where and to whom *the trail of clues* point.

We need a way of thinking about this world, seeing this world, and living in this world that fills our lives with **purpose, meaning, and significance**.

The answer to these questions has got to go way beyond *me*, to *something, Someone* much bigger. Our faith teaches us that we're too small to figure it out on our own. And so God has graced us with the keys that can unlock the mysteries of why we're here, what we're supposed to do, and how we can do it.

Our passage this morning is one of the most famous passages in Scripture. I think it's so powerful because it gets to the heart of these questions so succinctly:

***He has told you, O mortal, what is good  
and what the Lord requires of us.***

God first says what he *doesn't* require of us. God doesn't need an outward show or amazingly costly gestures to somehow buy God's acceptance. We can't transform God's covenant into a contract.

It's tempting to want to offer God everything—*except for that one thing God longs for*—an obedient and loving heart. It isn't about trying to change God. God wants to change us.

Paul talks about this inward sacrifice in Romans when he says,

"I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." [Romans 12:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

**God wants us—we're the sacrifice.** Not calves or rams or rivers of oil. We find ourselves by dying to ourselves.

This is our divine call, our task, the mission given to us where we sacrificially serve God and serve others in the strength God provides. Something happens when we recognize that *it's not all about me*. That God is God and we're not God. That God is immortal and we're mortal. Our priorities get divinely realigned.

When we fess up that we fall short, that we need God and that we can't do it on our own—we find ourselves perfectly positioned. God can help us do what we're supposed to do.

**God has told you, O mortal what is good.  
What does the Lord require of you?**

***Do justice.  
Love mercy.  
Walk humbly with your God.***

That's it. Simple—but so intense, so condensed. This is what it's all about. It takes a lifetime to unpack it, to flesh it out.

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**First, do justice.** When we find ourselves in a position of strength or good fortune—we don't just look out after ourselves. We help those who have been wronged, neglected, or are in need.

With God's strength and wisdom, we can **actively uphold and do what's right.** We're committed to have integrity in our interactions and relationships. This involves the small things and the big things.

Doing justice transcends what political party we're in. As Christians, whether we're democrat, republican, or independent—we've all got to flee from and speak out against oppression, lying, and shady dealings. Not only in our own private world, but in society. We speak up and act for those who are being abused or exploited.

**Second, Micah says "love mercy."** We are to **do** justice and to **love** mercy.

Mercy is our posture, our outlook, our attitude, our way of relating with others—which is characterized by grace, loyalty, kindness, and generosity—not animosity.

Mercy—**hesed** in the Hebrew--is a *relationship* word. We extend God's love to those around us. So we love goodness. We demonstrate acts of kindness.

God's love never stops with us. **Hesed** involves mutuality. Partnership. Give and take.

God empowers us to exhibit **hesed** in our relationships—in our marriages, in our families, in our church, our friendships, workplaces, dealings with strangers, foreigners, or those different from us-- wherever we find ourselves. To love mercy is a life-long quest of right relationships with our fellow human beings where we show constant love, not hatred.

**Hesed** helps us to really **see others as Christ sees them.** **Hesed** helps us **see Christ in them.**

**Third, walk humbly with your God.** To walk humbly with God is a measured and circumspect way of life that attends to **God's will and way.**

Paul described this way of life to the Ephesians:

*Look carefully how you walk, like sensible not senseless people . . .*

*Do not be thoughtless, but discern what the Lord's will is. ([Ephesians 5:15, 17](#))*

To walk humbly with God means that we **thoughtfully extend God's grace to others.** We lean upon and look to God in everything.

Micah goes on in the next verse. If you do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God—*then you'll achieve wisdom.* You'll live a purposeful, well-lived life.

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So Micah helps us find ourselves engaging those 4 questions:

The question of **Identity**: *Who am I?*

- I'm a child of God.

The question of **Value**: *Do I matter?*

- I'm made in God's image and I'm God's workmanship.

The question of **Purpose**: *Why am I here?*

- To glorify and enjoy God by doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

The question of **Agency**: *Can I make a difference?*

- Yes, God has called me and equipped me through the Holy Spirit to live into this good and joyful purpose for my life.

**Amen.**

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