

Recently Jayne and I were talking about our roommates from college back in the day before the two of us decided to become roommates. My college roommate resume includes three very different personalities, Dan, Doug and Jeff. Now Jeff was an intriguing fellow. He had never been too far from home until he went off to college, so in college he was hardly ever in the dorm room. He was constantly on the move, sometimes in the wee hours of the morning after curfew he was trying to get into the dorm. He sometimes slept through his morning classes because they were so inconveniently scheduled before lunch. I'll always be grateful to Jeff for teaching me how to play the guitar. Once I had learned the intro to the Beatles' Blackbird I thought I was pretty hot stuff. Jeff was a free spirit and he had a great sense of humor. He was raised in a strict Brethren church but you'd never know it. He loved acting and drama and he often told people, "Just remember. Jesus loves me and he loves you."

When he became angry, however, Jeff would simply say with a completely straight face, "Just remember, Jesus loves me, and he **LIKES** you." But when things really went badly—I mean really off the rails, he would eventually throw up his hands and look to the sky and yell, "Good God Almighty, what do you want from me?" Have you ever felt like doing that? Just looking up at God and pleading with him, "Good God Almighty, what do you want from me?"

It just so happens that this is the upshot of Micah's message in chapter 6 of his book of prophecy. Micah is of course another of the Minor Prophets, from the collection of books that make up the closing portion of the Old Testament. We have been looking at the Minor Prophets for a few weeks, taking a look at a different one each week. Today we turn our attention to Micah. Micah was the prophet of the downtrodden and exploited people of Judean society. He prophesied during a time of great social injustice and boldly opposed those who imposed their power upon the poor and weak for selfish ends. Sounds similar to today, doesn't it?

As he preaches to the people, Micah himself raises the question that my old college roommate would sometimes ask – "Good God almighty, what do you want from me?" Of course, Micah is a bit more poetic about it. He says, "And what does the Lord require of you?" God's requirements come in the form of a three-fold response, beginning with "act justly." (Adapted from "What Does God Want From Me?" by W. Maynard Pittendreigh © 2002)

ACT JUSTLY. Or, in other words, act with fairness, honesty, and integrity. Micah had a special concern for justice, primarily because he saw so little of it. What God requires of us is that we do what is right and fair in our relationships with other people. Justice involves the sense of a standard of equality among people. It can be as simple as being honest in even the smallest routine business transaction. In Micah, the prophet complained about the person who uses "*dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights*" (Micah 6:11).

There is an old saying, "honesty is the best policy." But for Micah that slogan should be, "honesty is the **ONLY** policy." This is a consistent theme throughout Scripture—that we are called to be people of fairness and integrity in all our dealings. In Psalm 51:6 we read, "*You desire truth in the inward parts.*"

In Proverbs 4:23 we read, "*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring all the issues of life.*" We must settle it deep in our hearts to be a people of integrity, and be on guard in the battle to "act

justly.” Micah tells us three things God requires of us. One is to act justly. Easy task. But it is hard to make a reality.

We are a nation of cheaters – not necessarily on a large scale. We do a lot of cheating on a small scale that never makes the headlines. We cheat our neighbors. If we can swindle an employee, hide something or steal from our employer, we’ll find a way to do it. But God requires all of us—large corporations or individual persons—to act justly.

LOVE MERCY. The second thing that God requires of us is that we “love mercy.” We are also to fill our hearts with compassion and kindness toward one another. The Hebrew word that Micah uses here is translated as “mercy,” is a rich one, used variously as mercy, tender mercies, lovingkindness, steadfast love. It is a word that is most often used in a covenant sense, involving the attitude of two parties who are in covenantal relationship with one another. In relation to God’s mercy, it is used most often of his grace, or of his unexpected kindness.

Notice also that the requirement here is not that we **HAVE** mercy, but that we are to **LOVE** mercy. There is a big difference between the two. One way we could describe the difference is to say that we don’t just do acts of kindness from a sense of obedience or compulsion, but we do them out of love.

There seems to have been an emphasis in Jesus’ teaching on the idea of **UNEXPECTED** acts of kindness. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, it was the one considered least likely to offer help who did so. The parable of the prodigal son reveals to us the heart of a father who accepted his son against the expectation of almost everyone. The story of the woman caught in adultery teaches a compassionate mercy scarcely revealed in Old Testament Jewish law. The dying thief on a cross is a surprising lesson about the depth of God’s love and mercy.

Because we have such a merciful God, we are exhorted to have mercy. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*” (Matthew 5:7). Peter wrote, “*All of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted*” (1 Peter 3:8). Mercy is often not what we would show one another; but it is the only response that makes any sense in light of the mercy that God has shown us in Jesus Christ.

Micah tells us three things God requires of us. One is to act justly. The second is to love mercy. They both sound like fairly easy tasks. But they are hard to make a reality of a life lived. We don’t love mercy. We don’t value kindness. We often return rudeness with more rudeness. We allow opportunities to show kindness to pass us by. When we should be gentle with others, we are harsh. Getting to the third thing the Lord requires we hear...

WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD. Have you noticed yet that when Micah tells us what God expects, the first two things he requires have nothing to do with God? They have to do with how we behave toward one another. The Lord expects his children to treat one another with love and basically get along with one another. He expects his children to treat one another justly and fairly, and he expects his children to love mercy and to show kindness toward one another. But the third expectation Micah shares is that God expects us to have a right relationship with him—with God himself.

That right relationship with God always begins with humility, not arrogance. The New Testament letter of Ephesians reminds us, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from

yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (2:8-9). God expects us to walk humbly with him. Easy task. But it is hard to make a reality. We are arrogant. We are proud. We tend to think that God’s role is to make us happy, to serve us, to answer our prayers. But it is we who are to serve and glorify God.

Imagine this for a moment: You play professional soccer and your team has reached the semi-finals. With two minutes left in the game, you’ve somehow ended up in front of your own goal. An opponent’s getting in position to shoot, and your goalkeeper’s nowhere close to where he should be. In fact, there’s no way he’s going to get back in time, meaning you’re the only one standing between the enemy and the goal. Which of the following do you choose to do? 1) Prepare to stop the shot, no matter what. 2) Shrug and walk away, allowing your opponent to basically dribble the ball into the goal. After all, you’re not the goalkeeper, so it’s not your job to stop the ball.

I’m willing to bet you’d choose the first option (unless you’re secretly conspiring against your team). Now let’s change the scenario a bit. Your co-worker has a time-sensitive report due to one of her clients by the end of the day. But due to competing priorities, she doesn’t have the time to complete it. Frantically, she turns to you and asks if you can do her a favor and finish it up for her. What do you do?

Do you find a way to help her out, or do you shake your head no and respond with something along the lines of “That’s not my job.” Though a trip to the championship game isn’t on the line here, the integrity of your team member, and perhaps your company, is. I’m guessing that in this situation, you at least leaned toward helping her out—if not settling on that as your final decision.

“That’s not my job” has become a phrase commonly used in the workplace. “But that doesn’t mean it should be,” writes Abby Wolfe for The Muse, a company our own Jenna Viviano now works for. Sure, this attitude may help you avoid doing extra work, but it will also prevent you from advancing your career, and perhaps you’ll get labeled as someone unwilling to go above and beyond. It could also earn you a reputation as lazy and unaccommodating.

When people around you ask for help and you too easily give a “not my job” response, others will eventually catch on to that and begin to see you in a very negative light. Not to mention, you’re far less likely to get a positive answer when you are in a pinch and ask someone for a similar favor.

Micah poses a slightly different question: “What does the Boss require of us?” What does God want from us? Micah then answers his own question with a fairly straightforward answer. That’s because the real problems we have in life are not usually so much about what God wants, but about what we want. Try to finish this sentence: “I will be happy when…” There must be a million possible endings for that sentence, ranging from where we live, what job we have, who we marry, and so on. What Micah suggests is that our true happiness in life arises out of listening to what the Lord wants us to do. That is not really optional; but is “required” if we want to be happy and blessed.

So what does God want from us? Not that much, really. What God requires is this: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. But we had better think twice about answering the word of the Lord with, “Not my job.” Amen.