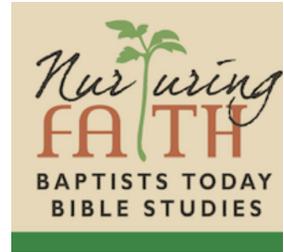


Adult Teaching Resources

January 29, 2017



Looking Forward (January 1-February 26)

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 – “It’s Always Time”

Isaiah 42:1-9 – “A Time for Justice”

Isaiah 49:1-7 – “A Time for Light”

Isaiah 9:1-4 – “A Time for Hope”

Micah 6:1-8 - “A Time for Mercy”

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A Time for Mercy

Micah 6:1-8

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Opening

As you begin class, ask each person to find a partner. Married couples may not be partners as the activity has the possibility to raise even more questions for couples that are together. When everyone has their partner and is comfortable, ask this question for each person to consider and share:

What is expected of you? What are your responsibilities—at home, at work, at church, in the community?

Give each person time to share their answers, then allowing each partnership time to discuss their answers. Finally, ask for volunteers to share their answers with the larger group.

Take some time with the larger group to discuss the expectations and responsibilities we have.

Reading the Bible

Our passage today ends with one of the most quoted and memorized verses in the Bible. It is important to note that verse is just a part of a larger section in the book of Micah, a prophet who often reminded Israel how they had fallen short of God's expectations for them.

Ask these questions from the text to help your group gain a better understanding of the entire passage:

Our lesson writer states that Micah set this passage to be portrayed in a certain dramatic location. What is that location? What elements from the passage support that assertion?

What did Micah ask on God's behalf? Why do you think it come across as an accusation?

Micah points out good things God has done for Israel. What are those things? Why are they important for Israel?

What was Israel's defense to God's accusation? With what kind of tone did they respond?

How does God counter their sarcastic remark?

What does God expect from Israel?

Making Connections

Our lesson began with the expectations we face as adults on a regular basis. Those expectations and responsibilities include all areas of our lives—family, work, friends, faith. Our passage today is at the core of what God expects from us. The words are easy to say and roll off the tongue in beautiful language, but living them out can be a challenge. Ask these questions for conversation and discussion to help your group understand what God desired from Israel and also desires from us:

If you were in a courtroom setting like what Micah set up in our passage, what complaints could you raise against God? What is the justification for your complaint? How would you want justice to be served?

How do you think God would respond to your accusation(s)? Would God be justified with that response? Why or why not?

Make a list of all the ways God has blessed you. Share that list with the person sitting next to you.

What does it mean to do justice? How does that happen? What is your role in that?

How do we love kindness? Why is that important?

What is so important about walking humbly with your God? How is that achieved? How do you know you've done it, or are doing it?

So What?

The verse, “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?” is one of the most memorized and quoted verses in the Bible.

Gather in smaller groups of 3-4 and ask each group to reflect on that verse and God's expectation for us. Then, ask each group to write their own version of God's expectation in words and phrases that make sense to them. Encourage them to think outside of the passage, while keeping the spirit of the passage in their writing. After each group has had some time to think and write, as everyone to share their new verse.

Spend some time discussing the new verses, asking for clarifications as needed, and digging deeper into the meaning of each verse.

The Challenge

Tell your group that in today's time together, we unpacked what it means to "do justice," "love kindness," and "to walk humbly with your God." We also spent time creating our own verse of what God requires, or expects, of us. Ask everyone, "How can you meet God's expectation this week?" Give them time to think about it and then invite them to turn to their neighbor to share what they can do and when they will do it this week.

Prayer

Loving God, you are very clear on what you require of us. Help us to do what you ask. It's not difficult, but we make it that way. Forgive us for not living in the way you desire. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Exceeding expectations? – Expectations are important, but sometimes trivialized. Have you dealt with a salesperson or service person who put you on notice that you’d be getting a follow up phone call or survey in the mail? Often they explain that if you don’t answer “exceeded expectations” of “five out of five” to all of the questions, it will make them look bad.

One has to wonder about the validity of surveys in which the respondents’ answers are coached, or a setting in which meeting expectations isn’t good enough.

Micah – Micah lived and worked in and about Jerusalem during precisely the same period as Isaiah. He hailed from Moresheth, a village near the city of Gath, in an area of fair and fertile hills about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

Micah appears to have belonged to the proletarian class. He had a keen social conscience and was a champion of the peasantry. He promoted ethical living and forcefully condemned the injustice, greed, and decadence of the controlling aristocracy who lived in the cities.

He was probably born in the neighborhood of 760 BCE: at least one of his oracles predates the fall of Samaria in 722, and other oracles seem to be clustered around the political crises of 711 (Sargon II) and 701 (Sennacherib). Though Micah prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, it didn’t happen for another 125 years.

Micah’s name is probably a contraction of *micaiyah*, which would mean “Who is like Yahweh?” Micah was a gifted prophet, and apparently had some influence, at least on Hezekiah. We read about this in Jer. 26:18-19, which quotes Micah 3:12 – the only time in the Old Testament where a prophet is named and quoted verbatim.

Micah seems to have appeared primarily as a “prophet of doom.” His oracles that appear to have historical connections are almost inevitably pessimistic. There are, however, some oracles of hope scattered within the book, with chapters 4-5 being almost solely related to the themes of hope and salvation. At times, however, the oracles of hope seem out of context (cf. 4:1-5, 7:7-20), leading some to speculate that they were inserted by a later hand, perhaps as late as the postexilic period.

As a rule, the first three chapters are generally regarded as authentic to Micah. Some scholars think chapters 6-7 written by Micah, and even fewer think chapters 4-5 came from the hand of the 8th century prophet. It is not impossible, however, to imagine that the same prophet who predicted doom could also harbor visions of hope.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Covenant lawsuits – Micah’s portrayal of a lawsuit (Hebrew *rib*) between God and Israel is often called a “covenant lawsuit” because the law it was based upon – and which Israel had violated – was the covenant agreement between Yahweh and Israel, first sealed at Sinai and renewed a number of times afterward.

Other Old Testament texts that portray similar lawsuits can be found in Psalm 50; Isa. 1:2-3, 3:13-15; and Jer. 2:4-37.

O mortal – Micah’s statement of divine expectations is God’s word to *all* people. Most translations say “He has told you, *O man*, what is good ...” The word translated as “man” is “*adam*,” the Hebrew word for humankind. In context, Micah was talking to Israel, but God’s purpose was for the people of the covenant to become witnesses and examples for all nations to follow.

This is what God expects of all people. This is what is good. These are the characteristics that should define our lives: that we do justice, that we love kindness, that we walk humbly with our God.

Do justice – When I was a boy, students from all twelve grades rode the school bus together. In our county, we had two schools. One was for the white children, and one was for the black children, and both of them served all twelve grades on single campuses.

There was a boy at our school, several years ahead of me, whose name was Jimmy Justice. I remember liking that name. I rarely had the nerve to talk to older students, but when Jimmy was about to graduate, I saw him passing as the buses rolled out, and I yelled out the window, “Do justice, Jimmy!”

I thought I was being clever, and didn’t realize I was quoting Micah. I’m not sure what Jimmy thought about my impertinence, but that is our calling: to do justice, whatever our name is.

As I spoke those words to a boy named Justice, it never occurred to me that we were both willing participants in a school system that was inherently unjust, because it treated people of one race as more precious and privileged than people of another race. I was so much a part of the culture in which I lived that I did not question the inherent injustice of it. Only later would I be confronted with my homegrown prejudices, and to appreciate the importance of basic human rights for all people. I suspect others could share similar stories.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T – Both history books and daily newspapers are replete with the terrible results of what happens when people do not respect others. We have a tendency to label others with pejorative nicknames or to lump them into a less favored category, and they cease to be real people in our eyes. Because we don’t see them as deserving of the same respect we receive, it’s much easier to abuse them.

Digging Deeper *continued*

That's how the early American South justified slavery, how Hitler justified the gas chambers, and how militant religious extremists justify the mass murder of innocent civilians. That's how young men who think of themselves as upstanding citizens can justify terrorizing other young men because they are gay.

Doing justice begins with respect for the humanity and the basic rights of all people – and it includes coming to the aid of those who are victims of injustice and cannot help themselves. Again, you may remember Dr. King saying “Life's most persistent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” – and “The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people.”

A course in kindness – If anyone needs a remedial course in how to “love kindness,” I suggest that you spend a few afternoons watching *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, and pay attention. I'm not kidding.

In 1994, my young daughter Bethany was killed in a wreck caused by a drunken driver. A few weeks after Bethany's death, while I was still at home recovering from my own injuries, I wrote Mr. Rogers a letter and thanked him for being a part of Bethany's neighborhood, for making her feel special every day.

About a week later, the phone rang. It was Fred. He could have responded to my letter with a card, or by having a staff person call, but he didn't. He took the time to call and reach out, beginning a meaningful friendship that lasted until his untimely death in 2003.

I once visited Fred in his office above the PBS studio in Pittsburgh where *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood* was filmed. His office was tiny and filled with two couches and a chair that were old, but not antique. There was no desk, just piles of trolleys and pictures to autograph for children, books and scripts, writing materials and an eclectic collection of pictures and quotations on the wall. Fred won a boatload of honors and awards in his career, but none of them were displayed. Instead, there was a Hebrew verse about love, and a plaque with the Greek word for grace, and a large piece of Chinese calligraphy that he translated as a traditional Chinese proverb: “If you want to see yourself clearly, don't look in muddy water.”

I think one of Fred's greatest gifts was his ability to act as an undistorted mirror – to reflect back to people their inherent, essential worth and loveableness. If others look at you and see only more of our culture's muddy water, they won't see their own worth in God's eyes clearly. That challenges us to offer the clear reflection that comes compassionate kindness. I learned from Mr. Rogers that when you show respect, it helps others feel worthy of respect. When you show love, they feel lovable. When you act as if they are special, they feel special.

That's the best picture I know of what it means to “love kindness.” You will make your family, your neighborhood and your world a better place if you work at becoming a person who is steadfast and loving.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Is it mercy, or love?

As noted in the lesson, the second element in God's expectations is often translated differently. The familiar KJV and the NIV11 say "to love mercy." The NASB95 and NRSV have "to love kindness." The NET says "to be faithful." The Hebrew has "and to love *hesed*." The word *hesed* can be translated as "mercy" or as "kindness," but is more than both. Some have tried to capture it with "lovingkindness." Often it conveys the idea of loyalty or faithfulness. Perhaps the best translation is "steadfast love."

Hesed is the quintessential attitude of God toward His people, used often in the Hebrew Bible. Do you remember Psalm 118, where every verse is punctuated with the phrase "His steadfast love endures forever"? That's the word *hesed*.

Do you remember the story of when Moses on the mountain asked to see God, and the Lord passed by? God proclaimed a self-revelation of character: "*Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...*" (Exod. 34:6). In that text, "steadfast love" translates the word *hesed*.

Hesed is in some ways the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament word *agapē*, which describes the kind of steadfast and self-sacrificing love that Jesus showed for all people, and that Jesus called his followers to show to others.

More than once, Jesus taught that the sum of God's commands is to love God and love others. In John 13:34-35, he said "*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

To love mercy, to love kindness, to show steadfast love, is to love as Jesus loved. If we are to be the people that God has called us to be and the world so desperately needs us to be, we will do justice precisely because we share that steadfast, merciful love. We know what it means to receive mercy, and out of gratitude we learn to show mercy.