

Foundational Guidance (Part 1)

Micah 6:8

Richard Tow 3-6-16

What does God want you to do? Have you ever found yourself asking that question? At one level it is a daily question. Someone gets upset with you at work; and you need God's wisdom on how to deal with it. You're at the department store trying to decide which coffee pot to buy. You whisper a quick prayer asking God which one to purchase. We are continually dependent upon the Lord to guide us even in the little daily decision. At another level, there are times when we need to make significant decisions that are not easy to make. You are doing ok on your job; but you just received an offer with better pay. Is it God's will or not? Are there factors here that I can't possibly know? How easy will it be to work for my new boss? What will the coworkers be like? God, what do you want me to do?

I am not here to give you the answer to those kinds of questions. But I want to share with you from the word of God a foundational point of guidance that keeps the other decisions in perspective. The process of deciding to take the new job offer or not, can be stressful. We don't want to make a bad decision. Wrong turns consume time, energy, and money. Most of us don't have a lot of that to spare. So when we're faced with choices we have to know in our hearts, there are some things this decision will not change. There are some things that remain settled. There are some things that are not negotiable at all.

So the question is, "God, what do you want me to do?" The undergirding answer to that question is found in our **text today. Mic 6:8** *"He has shown you...."* To an extent He has already revealed the answer. *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"*¹ First, we will consider the context of this statement. Second, the content of the statement.² Third, the capacity of this statement to bring stability in our lives.

I. CONTEXT:

God made this statement to Israel during a time when the nation was not walking close to Him. God's people had forgotten His goodness to them. They had developed a religious system that had a semblance of piety in it; yet, the hearts of the people were far from God.³ Follow with me as we read our verse in context, beginning in verse 1.

Mic 6:1-8 "Hear now what the LORD says: 'Arise, plead your case before the mountains, And let the hills hear your voice. 2 Hear, O you mountains, the LORD's complaint, And you strong foundations of the earth; For the LORD has a complaint against His people, And He will contend with Israel. 3 "O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me." 4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the

¹ All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² Perhaps the first section should be entitled "the contrast to the statement" of our text. This first section focuses on what Israel was doing in contrast to what God wanted them to do. Micah 6:6-7 reveal religious feats that were impressive: *"...thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil?"* They had bragging rights for the great things they were doing for God. Unfortunately, the text clearly reveals that God was not impressed!

³³ Isa 29:13 "Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote' (NASU).

⁴ God is bringing His case against a disobedient people as if court were in session.

house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. 5 O My people, remember now What Balak king of Moab counseled, And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, From Acacia Grove to Gilgal, That you may know the righteousness of the LORD. ' 6 With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"

Micah lived from about 750 to 686 BC. The first few verses in the book tell us the kings who were Micah's contemporary.⁵ Micah actually prophesied the downfall of the Northern kingdom and the eventual desolation of the Southern kingdom.⁶ He was a contemporary of Isaiah and both prophets pointed out this issue of religious activity verses moral sincerity and obedience. So the verse we're about to consider stands in **contrast** to the questions raised in verses 6 & 7. "*With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* All of these possibilities involve efforts to appease God: blood sacrifices of calves and rams; rivers of oil offerings. Then the ultimate sacrifice (something far from God's desire): they would even slaughter their firstborn children. They gave God everything but the one thing He wanted: obedience!

Remember when King Saul disobeyed God and tried to justify his disobedience to Samuel. God had told Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Instead Saul saved back the best stuff and made sacrifices to God with it. In 1 Samuel 15 the prophet asked Saul why he had not obeyed the Lord. He tried to justify himself and talked about the sacrifices that had been made. Then Samuel said to him in 1 Sam 15:22 "*Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*" Saul was willing to be very religious; he was not willing to simply do what God told him to do.

At about the same time as Micah was addressing this problem, Isaiah brought this message from God in chapter 1:10-20. "*Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; (Jerusalem) Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: 11 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. 12 "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? 13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies --I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. 14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. 16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the*

⁵ Micah 1:1. See NIV Study Bible for discussion of dates.

⁶ Micah 1:6, 12. Samaria was the capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel.

fatherless, Plead for the widow. (This is Micah 6:8 stated in a different way. This is the pure religion James talks about in his epistle.)

18 "Come now, and let us reason together, "Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. (God has a remedy for our struggles with sin. He has provided the sacrifice for cleansing us of all sin. All we have to do is come to Him in humility and sincerity.)

19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The tendency to substitute religious stuff for a lack of sincere obedience runs all through man's history. The Pharisees of Jesus day were doing exactly that. They were Bible thumpers, Bible quotters, church attenders; but when it came down to it, they did what they wanted to do and whitewashed it with a little religion.⁷ For hundreds of years the Catholic Church operated exactly the same way: say a hundred Hail Mary's and fifty Our Fathers and everything will be fine. Of course, we protestants have our own religious culture that often circumvent the call to sincere repentance and obedience to God. I honestly wonder what the Lord would say to the American Church today? Would He say the same thing He says here to Israel? Would He commend us on some points and correct us on others as Jesus did in Revelations 2 and 3? I don't know; but the Bible gives a very clear warning. Guard your heart. Do the right thing. Live humbly with God and others, because religious stuff will not make up for not doing those things.

The message in our text is not just to Israel. The text says, "*He has shown you, O man....*" The Hebrew is 'adam.⁸ This instruction is to all children of Adam, all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. "*He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you....*" Every human being will give account to the Creator on this responsibility.

Now let's examine the:

II. CONTENT of the statement.

"...to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"

There are obviously three elements in this command.

(1) "...to do justly...."

This simply means we do what is right; we treat people right; we do unto others what we would have them do to us.⁹ Even non-believers will often do that if it cost them nothing to do it. The real test is when we have to pay a personal price to do the right thing. Have you ever made a promise to someone and later wish you hadn't made that promise. But a promise is a promise. My word is my bond. I can't just ignore the commitment. I have to follow through even when circumstances make it hard to do. Psalm 15:4 says that God honors the person "*who swears to his own hurt and does not change.*" The NIV is a clearer translation. "*...who keeps his oath even when it hurts.*" Does that describe you? Are you a person who will do what you said you would do, even when it hurts?

⁷ Matt. 9:13; 23:23

⁸ OT:120 (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

⁹ The Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 applies here.

To do justly means I don't take advantage of other people, especially the weak and defenseless. The Bible has a lot to say about how we treat the fatherless and the widow. They are representative of vulnerable people. A lot of scams (that go on today) target elderly people because they are more easily misled. So mailings go out that look like they're from the government telling them this is their final notice. Telemarketers call them with various offers. Those people may not be widows. They may not be orphans. But they are the weak and vulnerable and it is exactly the same thing.

To do justly means I will be fair in all my dealings. I will give my employer a good day's work whether he is watching me or not. I will show up on time and work for the benefit of that company. I would not steal even a paper clip from my boss. It doesn't belong to me, so I don't take it home. On the other side of the issue, I will give my employees a fair wage. Some employers think it's simply smart business to give their employees as little as possible; keep the profit line high at any cost. I have been in corporate setting where you were highly esteemed if you could negotiate an unjust agreement that gave the fat cats more money. I've known business men who thought they were smart because they found a way to deceive and manipulate and make more money. They only forgot one thing: the God of justice.

Let's read a little further from our text and see what God has to say about justice.

Mic 6:9-12 *"The LORD's voice cries to the city -- Wisdom shall see Your name: "Hear the rod! Who has appointed it? 10 Are there yet the treasures of wickedness In the house of the wicked, And the short measure that is an abomination? 11 Shall I count pure those with the wicked scales, And with the bag of deceitful weights? 12 For her rich men are full of violence, Her inhabitants have spoken lies, And their tongue is deceitful in their mouth."* So here is a picture of injustice: lies and deceit; inaccurate scales that tip in my favor; violent, aggressive tactics that intimidate and dominate. There are people across America who conduct their business this way every week. On Sunday morning they are in church, giving their tithe, and celebrating how God has prospered them. But if they are prospering in that way, it is not God prospering them. The religious talk does not negate the unjust behavior. The whole thing is self-deceiving and may even deceive others; but it will never fool God.

Justice is a prominent characteristic of God that is seldom celebrated in our culture. We celebrate mercy because we want mercy. And God is merciful. But God is also just—He always has been just and He always will be just. And He expects that same characteristic in us. I know people who really understand mercy; but have no sense of justice. Does a one-way relationship make you uncomfortable? I am not comfortable with taking, and taking, and taking from someone; and never giving anything back. I notice that wealthy friends are often shocked when I insist on paying for lunch. They know I have no money; they have money. They are used to people like that presuming upon them. I refuse to do that. I may not be able to pay every other time; but I will find a way to treat that person justly. That is just as important as showing mercy to someone who has less than me. Develop a sense of mercy. Develop a sense of justice. Do people right even when it costs you.

Do them right, even if they don't do you right! My behavior should never be determined by what someone else does. I don't react in like kind. If I'm slapped on the cheek, I don't slap

them back; I turn the other cheek.¹⁰ Wrong behavior done to me never justifies me doing wrong in response. Take the high road. Be the kind of person God has called you to be. “...to do justly....”

(2) “...*To love mercy....*”

The better I know God and the better I know myself, the more I appreciate mercy. Mercy develops in our own hearts when we realize just how dependent we are on it for ourselves. So we pray, “*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*” (Matt. 6:12). That’s a daily prayer for the Christian. We don’t just need mercy to be born again; we need mercy continually. Yes we strive to live godly lives; we treat others justly as best we can. But even with our best efforts we come short of the glory of God.¹¹ If we don’t think we need mercy, we have probably become self-righteous and are in serious spiritual peril.

John tells about the time the scribes and Pharisees caught a woman in the act of adultery. They brought her to Jesus and reminded him that the Law required that she be stoned. They, no doubt, had planned this out to put Jesus in a quandary. What they left out of the calculation was their own guilt before God. So Jesus quietly wrote on the ground as if he did not hear them. When they insisted on an answer as to what should be done to her, Jesus rose up and simply said, “*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*” (John 8:7 KJV). Everybody there, but Jesus, needed mercy. The Bible says they were convicted in their conscience and went away one by one. Then Jesus extended mercy to the woman.

Matt 5:7 “*Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.*” Jesus taught a direct correlation between the mercy we extend to others and the mercy we are able to receive. In that sermon He later said, “*Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye*” (Matt 7:1-5). Anytime we are passing judgement on other people, we are on thin ice. We do have to evaluate and discern things; but we must be very careful that we are not operating in pride or self-righteousness. We must be careful that we are genuinely seeking the wellbeing of everyone involved. We must be very careful that we are extending the same kind of mercy we would want to have if we were in that situation. “*For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*” Matt 6:15 “*But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” Go easy on other people, you might that sometime yourself. Paul puts it this way in Eph. 4:32 “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*”

¹⁰ Luke 6:28-29. When you react in like kind, you are giving the other person power over your decisions. You are allowing that person to determine what kind of person you will be. Do you really want to give them that much power?

¹¹ Rom 3:23 “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (KJV). The Greek verb “*hustereo*” translated “*come short*” is in the present tense indicating continual action. Paul is writing to Christians who continually need to draw upon God’s mercy and would be wise to show the same to others.

I read the story the other day of a mother who was hurt by her daughter. Her home consisted of one room with a dirt floor in a poor Brazilian village. On the walls was an old calendar, a faded picture of a relative and wooden cross.

Maria's husband had died when Christina was an infant. The young mother got a job as a maid to provide food and clothes for her and her daughter. It is now 15 years later and she thinks the worst is behind her. Christina is now old enough to get a job and help out.

But Christina is high-spirited and curious about the world in the big cities. She is a beautiful young girl and could have easily gotten married. But she dreamed of trading her dusty neighborhood for the exciting avenues of city life. The thought of that horrified Maria. She tried to explain to Christina how life in the city would really be. "No one knows you there. Jobs are scarce and the life is cruel. If you went there it would be very hard to make a living."

Maria knew what kind of living Christina would be forced into if she went to the city. That's why her heart broke when she awoke one morning to find her daughter's bed empty. Maria knew immediately where her daughter had gone and what she must do to find her. She quickly threw some clothes in a bag, gathered up all her money, and headed out of the house.

On her way to the bus stop she went into the drug store to get one last thing: pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures. With her purse full of small black and white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro. When she arrived there she began her search at bars, hotels, nightclubs, and any other places with a reputation for street walkers and prostitutes. At each place she left her picture—taped to a bathroom mirror, tacked on a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo she wrote a note.

It wasn't long before the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The worn-out mom wept as she made her long journey back to her small village.

It was a few weeks later that the young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth; but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dreams had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade the countless beds for the little pallet she had slept on growing up. But that little village was in, too many ways, far, far away.

As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She took a second look; and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was the compelling invitation: Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home." And that's what Christina did!¹²

When the heart is filled with love, mercy comes easy. "*...to do justly, To love mercy, And....*"

(3) "*...to walk humbly with your God?*"

No sin separates us from God like the sin of pride. C. S. Lewis calls pride "the essential vice, the utmost evil." In *Mere Christianity* he wrote, "Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil:

¹² Max Lucado, "Come Home," *Stories for the Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books, 1996) pp. 145-147.

Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”¹³ Walking with God always calls us to a walk of humility. The closer you walk with Him the more sensitive you are to opportunities for humbling yourself. Humility does not automatically come with pain and suffering. Hard times simply make some people hard. Our response is essential. That’s why Peter tells us to

“...be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6). Life will bring you and me plenty of opportunities to do that. See them as opportunities to draw closer to God. Every conflict is an opportunity to humble yourself. Every failure; every mistake is are opportunities to acknowledge dependence on God and put down pride. We can resist those opportunities; dig in and refuse to humble ourselves. Or we trust God with our reputation and walk humbly with Him.

You have probably heard of the great missionary to the American Indians, David Brainerd. He was seen lying in his hut, teaching a child his ABC’s. Somebody asked what is going on with the great David Brainerd teaching the ABC’s. Brainerd replied, “I have prayed that as long as I live, I might be useful to God. Now I am too weak to preach, I am too feeble to do anything else but just teach this little child the alphabet; and I shall keep on doing something for my Master till I die.”¹⁴ Humility lays aside appearances; and serves. That’s walking humbly with God.

You cannot walk humbly with God unless you’re willing to walk humbly with people. Walking humbly with God means I esteem others better than myself; it means I acknowledge failures and shortcomings; it means I apologize when an apology is due.

The reward of all that is a closer walk with Jesus!

Isa 57:15 “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

So the question becomes: Can I do justly, love mercy and not get prideful about doing it? Doing one of these is not enough. We must be just in all our dealings with others. That means we do every body right even when it costs us to do it. We must be merciful to others because we will most certainly need some mercy along the way. And we must walk humbly with other people as we walk humbly with God. No amount of religious ritual, churchy talk, etc. can substitute for that.

In conclusion I want to talk briefly about the

III. CAPACITY of this revelation to bring stability in our lives.

This is what I do regardless of what else happens. I will continue to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God. If I get a promotion at my job or if I get fired, it makes no difference fundamentally in what I am going to do. I will do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with my God. If people speak well of me or if they speak evil of me, it does not change the basic direction I am going. If I look successful or am a complete failure in people’s eyes (if I’m mocked or if I’m applauded) the essence of my life remains unchanged.

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins: New York, 1980) pp. 121-122.

¹⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) p. 211.

I will get up in the morning; have my devotionals; go about my work whatever that may be; try to influence people toward the Lord every day; go to bed and get a good night's sleep; and get up the next day and do the same.

Nothing and no one can stop me from living out Micah 6:8, except me. I have decided to be that kind of person. I have decided to live that kind of life. If I am the janitor or the CEO it's still basically the same.

This is the keel that keeps you from bobbing back and forth in the storms of life. How many know what the keel on a ship is? Along the central "spine" beneath the boat is a vertical board running underwater from front to back. It keeps the boat from rolling over from side to side. Without a keel, strong winds and waves could cause the boat to capsize.¹⁵ With a keel the storms can come and go without flipping the ship over. Have any storms hit your life? Have you had any shifting circumstances to deal with? Micah 6:8 is the keel that stabilizes your course. The phrase "even keel" means a person is balanced and has a calm even disposition.¹⁶ That phrase comes from the function of the keel on a ship. We would more commonly say he is even tempered or emotionally stable.

So with Micah 6:8 as our foundational guidance, the winds of change have little effect. I'm not tossed around by the opinion of others; and I'm not tossed around by shifting circumstances. I am anchored in Jesus and I know what I'm going to do and where I'm going, come what may.

Get this decision firmly established in your heart. God has told me what He wants. By His grace I will live accordingly. 8 *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"*

¹⁵ Chris Woodford, "Ships and Boats," accessed 3-5-16 at <http://www.explainthatstuff.com/how-ships-work.html>. During the audio presentation of this message I mistakenly referred to the keel as the rudder.

¹⁶ Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon accessed 3-5-16 at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/even-keel>.