

## God's Syllabus: Justice, Mercy, and Humility

Scripture: Micah 6:1-8

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Alfred is a community focused on education. Many of us focus on education for our life work, or are retired from it. We represent many different disciplines, but there's a tool common to all – the syllabus. I've probably put together more than 100 in my career; the most recent was for a computer skills course in Ethiopia 4 years ago.

(For non-educators – “a summary outline of a course of study” – Deals with goals of the course and how student progress toward goals is measured--what does the teacher expect from students. It's given to each student on the first day of class)

How many of us have put one together? (Show of hands)

Let's look at God's syllabus—what does God want of us? How should we live? A succinct Bible passage from God's prophet Micah tells us.

Background: a minor prophet, contemporary of Isaiah, 8 century BC.

200 years after Jewish kingdom of David and Solomon was split into Israel and Judah (historical background in II Kings 15-20)

Many problems of that society were same then as now:

-some get rich at expense of others, corruption in high places, people were self-centered and greedy

Micah was a farmer who was called by God to come to the center of power with message of God's judgement. In chapter 6 Micah uses the setting of a courtroom: “Arise and state your case” (v. 1). God is the judge, Micah is prosecutor. The jury? Mountains, hills, the “foundations of the earth” (v. 2)

The charge? Israel is tired of God and has chosen to go its own way. Vs. 3-5 God asks “Why?—look at all I've done for you.” Freedom from Egypt, good leadership, rescue from enemies.

Vs. 6 and 7 (read) Israel's turn, “What can I do to set things right?”

-assumes God wants more ritual—what will satisfy God's requirements? More sacrifice of calves, rams, “shall I offer my firstborn for my transgressions?”. They show that ritual had become an end to itself, like a national insurance policy—we can sin as much as we want, as long as we pay our premiums at the temple.

Micah shakes his head – NO! they don't get it. His reply: vs. 8.

God's people have three characteristics (cf. Beatitudes of Jesus in Matt. 5 – these are OT Beatitudes)

1. Act / work for justice
2. Love mercy (kindness)
3. Walk humbly with God

This is not just a quick formula for pleasing God – it's a way of life.

First two: how we treat others – how we relate to God's people.

Third – how we relate to God.

**1. Act justly / do justice.** “Be fair to all people” We have a built-in sense of justice. We know when people aren’t being treated fairly. Common childhood expression: “No fair!” CS Lewis says this is one of the “natural law” proofs of a spiritual dimension to life. Where does this standard come from? We all expect fairness for ourselves, but take advantage of others. Lewis points out that this is evidence of our failure to measure up, even to our own standards – evidence that we sin (fall short). We can become hardened or immune to injustice – we can turn away so often that we don’t notice anymore. Questions to consider:

Does it bother us when people are exploited? Who are the exploited of today? What are the injustices of our region, our nation, our world? What groups of people experience more injustice than others? A focus of our lives can be to make the world a more just place, to compensate for institutional and systematic injustice.

Another aspect: Are we and our lifestyles part of injustice and oppression?

As people of God, our actions should be fair. We should not contribute to injustice. We should work to restore justice in situations that are unjust. These situations are common, and we can give money and time to help address them.

- Access to medical care
- Housing (Habitat for Humanity)
- Food (Food for the Hungry, Bread for the World)

No favoritism when dealing with a group (challenge for a teacher!)

-based on age, male vs. female, ethnicity.

God wants justice for all people. (Challenge: read 10 commandments and interpret in terms of justice).

**2. Love mercy.** (or love kindness). Jesus says in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the merciful.” The OT prophet Hosea tells us God is saying “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” This speaks to our relationship with others, especially those in need – those who are suffering in some way. God’s kingdom is a kingdom of right relationships. Right relationships build a community that accepts and encourages everyone. There are those around us who are victims of injustice, who are trapped by their circumstances.

As inspiration, look at the lives of the saints for illustrations of kindness, generosity, mercy, compassion, especially in situations where violence and selfishness rule.

“They will know we are Christians by our love.”

How can we be merciful? Look at the parable of the Good Samaritan:

- When we see someone in need, don’t turn away. We respond with compassion and a desire to help.
- Mercy is practical – we do something physical to help the needy person. The Good Samaritan cleaned and bound wounds and took the hurting to an inn for recovery.
- We are asked to be merciful even to our traditional enemies. The Samaritans and the Jews were separated by deep barriers of suspicion and tradition.

**3. Walk humbly with your God.** Our relationship with God is the source of ability to do 1 and 2. This speaks of spirituality.

Our walk with God is characterized by humility – recognition of our need for God and ability to turn over priorities to his control.

How do we exhibit humility – by trying? NO!

One of the great paradoxes of spiritual life – if we TRY to be humble, we build pride (the opposite of humility). We need to cultivate actions that take the focus off ourselves – focus our worship on God and his attributes. He must increase, we must decrease.

There is true and false humility. False is used to attract attention to ourselves – a pretense: “See how humble I am.”

Keep an eye on our motives. Why do we want to take on a new task—to satisfy our pride? Or to serve others and God and further his work on earth?

“Walk” implies activity. As we go about our routine, go with a sense of the presence of God in our lives. Part of our walk involves the spiritual disciplines—prayer, service to others, worship, Bible study, stewardship.

“...with YOUR God” – we belong to God. One of the basic needs of the human heart – to belong. This gives us security and prepares us for the challenges of life.

Our humility and walk with God should dominate our lives – we operate under his control:

- we do our job humbly
- we go to school humbly
- we relate to family and friends humbly
- we humbly repent of things that grieve God.

The essence of the Godly life:

Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God.

Ask ourselves: How am I doing in my daily walk? Is God pleased with my response to his syllabus?