

Adult Teaching Resources

January 29, 2023



January 1, 2023—Ecclesiastes 3:1-13—“It’s Always Time”

Season of Epiphany: What Does God Expect?

January 8, 2023—Isaiah 42:1-9—“Bringing Justice”

January 15, 2023—Isaiah 49:1-7—“Bearing Light”

January 22, 2023—Isaiah 9:1-7—“Multiplying Joy”

January 29, 2023—Micah 6:1-8—“Defining Expectations”

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Defining Expectations

Micah 6:1-8

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

Key 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? (Mic. 6:8)

Opening

After everyone arrives and gets settled, remain in the large group for today's Opening. Ask everyone to consider the expectations they have in their lives, especially when it comes to relationships. Have them consider these questions.

What expectations do you have from your family members?

What expectations do you have from your friends?

What expectations do you have from people you work with?

What expectations do you have from people at church?

How often do folks meet your expectations?

How often do folks not meet your expectations?

How do you handle the situation when folks do not meet your expectations?

Spend some time in conversation and discussion before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

Where does God say to plead your case? (plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice)

Who does God have a case against? (against his people, and he will contend with Israel)

What did God ask? (O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you?)

What did God declare that he did? (For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.)

What does God want them to remember? (the saving acts of the Lord)

What question does Israel ask? (With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?)

What does Israel wonder if it will be an appropriate offering? (Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What does Israel wonder what God would be pleased with? (thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?)

What does Israel wonder it should give to God? (my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?)

What has God told Israel it should do? (to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God)

Making Connections

What do you think are God's expectations for your church? How have/are you meeting them? How have/are you not meeting them?

Share a time when you have been accurately accused of doing (or not doing) something. What was the situation? Who accused you? What was your response? What ultimately happened? How did that event affect you?

Who helps keep you "on track" with your life and your expectations? How does that person keep you focused when you are in the wrong? When does that person "have your back" when you are in the right?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Micah believed the people had failed to appreciate God's blessings and had ignored God's guidance. He perceived that they had substituted religion for righteousness." Do you think the same statement could be made about us today? Why do you say that?

What do you do or say in hopes that God will have a positive attitude toward you? What is the motivation behind that? Do you think it works? Why do you say that?

When have you sacrificed something big (like the Israelites sacrificed an entire animal) as an offering to God? What did that offering "cost" you? What do you think that offering did for God?

What does righteous mean to you?

What does religious mean to you?

Would you rather be righteous or religious? Why do you say that?

What does it mean to "do justice?" How are you doing justice in the world today? If you aren't doing it, what can you do?

What does it mean to "love kindness?" How are you loving kindness in the world today? If you aren't, what needs to change so that you are?

What does it mean to "walk humbly with God?" How are you walking humbly with God in the world today? If you aren't doing it, what do you need to start doing first?

So What?

Remain in the large group and give everyone a slip of paper and pen. Ask each person to write down one expectation they feel God has for them. Their expectation can be narrowly focused and personal or broadly pointed and communal. Give everyone time to write their response, then collect the responses.

Read each response out, one at a time, and spend a few minutes letting your class discuss each expectation.

Then, ask your class to grade themselves on how well they meet God's specific expectation: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

In what areas of your life are you striving to meet this expectation?

In what areas of your life are you failing to meet this expectation?

What do you need to do to meet more of God's expectations?

Spend time in large group conversation and discussion.

The Challenge

This week, choose one thing you can do to help you meet God's expectation for your life.

What do you need to do so that you will "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for telling us specifically what you require of us. Even though it might be difficult, we commit ourselves to meeting your expectations. Give us what we need to do our best so that we can give our lives to you. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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” or “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 around 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). Micah correctly prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, even though 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.

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

Digging Deeper *continued*

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; Hosea 2:4ff; 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!”

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.

Respect—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.

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

Digging Deeper *continued*

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.

I was fortunate enough to have a personal friendship with Fred, and I once visited him in his office above the PBS studio in Pittsburgh where *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood* was filmed. His office was small, containing 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. 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.”

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 Cartledge

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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 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*.

Israel's core belief about God's character is best expressed in the story of how God proclaimed a self-revelation to Moses: "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*. That affirmation of God's loving character is repeated multiple times in scripture (Exod. 33:19; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 108:4, 111:4; Jonah 4:2, Joel 2:13, Rom. 2:4).

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.