

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FROM YOU?

MICAH 6:6-8

How many of you love the old movie, “The Wizard of Oz”? In our home, I try to hide the fact when it’s on because I’ll get “that look” from Cheryl. You know what I mean, husbands, don’t you? It’s that look that suggests, “Let’s take that journey down nostalgia lane yet again, dear....” The movie “The Wizard of Oz” is based on the book by Frank Baum by the same name. You’ll recall in the movie that the Tin Woodman wanted a real heart. The book actually tells you why. He hadn’t been made out of tin to begin with. He was an ordinary man who’d fallen in love with a Munchkin girl who promised to marry him if he earned enough money by chopping wood to buy them a house. But the girl’s mother hired the evil Witch to stop the wedding. The Witch put an evil spell on the ax that the woodman used which caused him to but off both his legs, both his arms and his head accidentally. Each was replaced by tin, but his heart remained in love with the Munchkin girl. Frustrated, the evil Witch caused the enchanted ax to split him in half which broke his heart. Only then did the Tin Woodman conclude, “I had no heart, so that I lost my love for the Munchkin girl and did not care....” Well, there you have it. Now you know the rest of the story!

The Bible talks a great deal about the heart – not the physical organ located in your chest – but the place from where you love, commit, obey and give yourself. We still talk about loving someone with all your heart or putting your whole heart into some kind of project. We also talk about losing heart. That means losing your passion for something that you used to care about a great deal – a career, playing a sport or a musical instrument, even a marriage. You can also have a heart for the things of God and you can lose heart for the things of God. That’s a big deal, because above all else God wants your heart. God’s people in Old Testament times lost their heart for God on multiple occasions. They looked religious, but they lacked any real heart for God. Many of the prophets – one of them named Micah - addressed that same issue at different times through Israel’s history. Let’s read something he wrote (Micah 6:6-8).

In verse 6, Micah asks a rhetorical question. You could paraphrase it to say, “What does God want from you? What’s God after in a personal relationship with you?” Then he offers some possibilities. In the Old Testament, people worshipped God differently than we do now. They brought animals to the Temple which were killed as an act of worship. Because it was an agricultural society, people didn’t bring money as an offering. They brought some of their produce instead – sheep, cattle, grain, oil, grapes – whatever. That’s what’s being referred to in verses 6 and 7. The question really is, “Does God want you to bring lots of offerings to the Temple as your expression of love for Him?”

The last part of verse 7 (NIV) sounds really weird: “... Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” What’s that about? Israel’s pagan neighbors worshipped their false gods in some horrendous ways. One terrible practice was to offer your first born child as a live sacrifice to prove

how much you loved your god. For example, one particular group worshipped a god named Molech which was made out of metal. They would heat up this idol until it was red hot and then toss babies onto or into this burning idol as an act of worship. That's what Micah is talking about here. Is that what God wants from you? Is that how you're supposed to show your loyalty and devotion to Him? What does God want from you? Micah gives a specific, three-part answer in verse 8 (NIV): "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." It's that answer I want us to think about today. First:

"TO ACT JUSTLY" IS INTEGRITY.

What does it mean "to act justly"? At the end of the day, Micah is talking about personal integrity. When integrity is at the very core and center of your life, its effects have an ever widening circle of influence. By the same token, lack of integrity results in the same dynamic – like the ripples of water that spread out across the water when you plunk a rock into a pond. The prophet Micah lived about 750 years before Jesus was born. It was an economic boom time in Israel, but material prosperity had fueled selfishness and corruption. The rich were taking advantage of the poor. People were being defrauded out of their land which was the basis of wealth in that time. When the poor or victimized went to the courts to get justice, they discovered that judges had been bribed in advance against them so that oppression and injustice was perpetuated. Through it all, many of these people doing these evil things still worshipped God by bringing animals for sacrifice, giving their offerings and singing songs of praise.

The people of God in Micah's day had replaced a true heart relationship with God for a false spirituality. They rationalized that they could treat their neighbors any old way they wanted, but then go to church, say their prayers, give their offerings and all would be well. They were sorely mistaken. Throughout the Bible, you learn an interesting lesson about what it means to love God. What's that? The single greatest evidence that you truly love God is how you treat other people. Are you fair? Are you honest? Do you "do right" by others? Is your word your bond? Do you tell the truth? The answers to those questions tell you more about your heart for God than anything else.

Integrity – to act justly – has so many applications to your life. Micah was most concerned with the issue of how people treat other people. That still matters today. Integrity is treating other people as if they're really made in the image of God – because they are! People have the intrinsic right to be treated with fairness, dignity and justice at all times. It's not liberals who should be the foremost champions against any form of racism. It ought to be Bible-believing Christians. It's not leftists who should demand equal opportunity for people to enjoy the fruit of their hard work and honest effort. It ought to be Bible-believing Christians. It's not socialists who should be advocating that people in the workplace be treated with justice and kindness and not be swindled out of a fair

wage and realistic benefits. It ought to be Bible-believing Christians. Friends, I know that good people can disagree on how best to achieve those worthy goals. I know it's complicated. All I'm saying is that the Bible demands that God's people of all people ought to be the ones out in front fighting for justice, for fairness and for the eternal value of every individual.

After all, only followers of Jesus have any logical, rational reason to treat people justly precisely because they're made in God's image. If you believe that human beings simply evolved from out of some primeval ooze, I can't understand on what basis you believe treating others with dignity is all that important. Why bother? Everyone is just a random collection of atoms and molecules. But if you believe every human being is a unique creation of God, now you have a rational reason to treat him or her with integrity. One clear example of that for me is the continued struggle over abortion rights in our country. At the end of the day, abortion is a matter of justice. Someone has observed that the most dangerous place in America today is not some urban ghetto but the womb of an American woman. You're more likely to lose your life there than anywhere else. Ending abortion is about doing what's right for the most defenseless in our society – the unborn. Since they can't speak for themselves, we should.

But don't forget to make integrity and acting justly a matter that is highly personal. You make decisions every day to act with integrity or not. "Who benefits here if I make this decision? Will I benefit at someone else's expense? Do I do the right thing even if it's difficult and doesn't seem to be in my best interests?" Every day is chock full of those kinds of decisions. How do you treat your spouse? Your kids? Your parents? The people you work with or live next door to? Is it with integrity? What does God want from you? Yes, He wants your heart and when He has your heart, you act justly. You practice integrity.

At a large hospital, a young nurse had shown up for her first day in the operating room. After one surgery, she said to the doctor, "You're removed eleven sponges, doctor; we used twelve." "I've removed them all," said the doctor. "We'll close the incision now." "No," objected that young nurse. "We used twelve." "I'll take the responsibility," the surgeon said sternly. "Suture!" "You can't do that! Think of the patient!" blazed the nurse. Then the doctor smiled, lifted his foot and showed the nurse the twelfth and missing sponge. "You'll do," he said. He'd been testing her for integrity- and she had it. Micah had a second answer to what God wants from you.

"TO LOVE MERCY" IS COMPASSION.

Integrity and compassion go hand in hand just like dishonesty and hard-heartedness go hand in hand. The people in Micah's day lacked integrity. It's no wonder, then, that they lacked compassion for those who ended up losing out. The poor were not there to be helped or pitied. They existed to be taken advantage of and scorned. The widow and orphan weren't there to be assisted.

They were there to be swindled out of what little they had left. When a person has no interest in justice, you can be sure there will be no use for compassion either. But if you believe that people have a right to be treated justly because they're made in God's image, then it follows that you'll treat them with compassion when they fall or fail in some way.

People don't always understand sermons, theology or the importance of getting your doctrine just right. But everyone understands compassion and anyone can show compassion. An elementary aged kid arrived home from school much later than usual. Mom was anxious. Where had he been all this time? He said, "On my way home I saw a little girl crying because a wheel had come off her tricycle. I stopped to try and help her." Mom said, "But you wouldn't be able to fix your own bike if a wheel came off. How did you think you could help her?" The boy said, "Well, I couldn't fix her bike, but I could help her cry." Sometimes compassion is just that simple: as the Bible says, weeping with those who weep.

Christian, you should be known for your compassion as much as your integrity. A few minutes ago, I spoke about abortion. While I believe with all of my heart that God hates abortion, I believe just as strongly that He loves the women who make that terrible choice. Many of those women face personal and family issues that call out for your compassion. By the same token, I believe the Bible is very clear that a homosexual lifestyle is sinful, but I also believe that every homosexual person deserves to be treated respectfully. True, some people are poor and stay poor by choice, but compassion teaches me that no child asks to be born poor, or go to bed hungry or receive little opportunity in life.

Compassion and integrity have something else in common. They both require you to make a choice. Yes, there will be times when you will not feel like acting compassionately just like there will be times when you'd rather not act honestly. But when you put aside your feelings and just do what you know God wants you to do, that's when you show yourself and others that you truly have a heart for God. Just like integrity, the choice to act compassionately may well come to you everyday. What about those closest to you in life: your spouse, your kids, your parents, your siblings? Do you treat them with compassion? How about fellow students, fellow employees, your neighbors? Would they point to you as an example of compassion? When other people hurt, what's your response?

Edgar Guest was an American poet. When he was a young man, his first child died. Here's something he wrote: "There came a tragic night when our first baby was taken from us. I was lonely and defeated. There didn't seem to be anything in life ahead of me that mattered very much. I had to go to my neighbor's drugstore the next morning for something, and he motioned for me to step behind the counter with him. I followed him into his little office at the back of the store. He put his hands on my shoulders and said, 'Eddie, I can't really express what I want to say, the sympathy I have in my heart for you. All I can is that I'm sorry, and I want you to know that if you need anything at all, come to me. What is mine

is yours.” Years later, Edgar Guest reminisced over that incident. He said, “Just a neighbor across the way – a passing acquaintance. Jim Potter, the druggist, may long since have forgotten that moment when he gave me his hand and his sympathy, but I shall never forget it – never in my life.” What’s the point? The point is that when you show other people compassion, it will never be forgotten. What does God want from you? Yes, He wants your heart. And when God has your heart, you love mercy. You show compassion. There’s a final answer to that question, “What does God want from you?”

“TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD” IS SURRENDER.

Right here you need to get rid of the thought that you can act with genuine integrity or compassion without inviting Jesus to be your Savior and Lord. The Bible says you’re a sinner. You need spiritual heart surgery. That happens when you face the fact that you can no longer trust in your own goodness to make you right with God but instead throw yourself on God’s grace and love. Your goodness is inadequate. You accept by faith that Jesus died on a cross for your sins and that He rose again to prepare a place in Heaven for you. You recognize and welcome His desire to live in and through your life everyday. Until and unless you make that decision, you can never truly walk humbly with God.

But knowing you’re a sinner doesn’t mean regarding yourself as a piece of garbage, a loser or a good for nothing blob. True humility is simply seeing yourself as God sees you. You know you’re of infinite worth to a holy and loving God.. After all, He sent His Son to die in your place. True humility goes on to recognize that because God is as great and wonderful as He claims to be, the only proper response is to live for Him every day: to obey Him, to be loyal to Him, to serve Him in ways that advance His Kingdom in this world. True humility is the simple recognition that living with Jesus and for Jesus is the only authentic way of life out there. True humility refuses to live life without that kind of relationship with God. There’s another word for that: surrender.

Integrity, compassion and surrender go together. When you surrender to God, you will treat other people with integrity and compassion. But if you’re refusing God’s leadership of your life, you can be sure that your heart will become hard and cold eventually. It happened to the people in Micah’s day. They may have worshipped God regularly, said grace at meals, given their offerings faithfully, but their hearts weren’t surrendered to God. It was deceiving. They looked spiritual on the outside, but on the inside they didn’t really want to follow God’s leadership. God only takes up residence in a surrendered, humble heart. The Bible says, “You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.” (Psalm 51:16-17 NLT)

So, what’s “a broken spirit”? It’s not someone who is psychotic or severely depressed. It’s simply any person who has faced the fact that God is Boss now

and forever. God cannot be ignored or disrespected. God is not to be kept in some safe little “religion” folder in my life and pulled out only when I need His help with some emergency. The person with a broken spirit is one who walks humbly with his or her God. The heart is surrendered to God. This is the person who at some point in his or her life has said, “OK, God, You win. I give up. I’m not going to try and live my life without You anymore. I surrender.” As a result, God now has access to every conceivable part of your life – every thought, every attitude, every ambition, every value, every plan and every behavior. And that attitude becomes a lifestyle. You begin to live like that every day. Jesus is now Lord. Of course, it doesn’t happen all at once. In fact, learning to surrender to God is a life-long journey. Jim Elliot, the missionary who was martyred in the jungles of Ecuador, put it like this, “One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is life long can only be surrendered in a lifetime.” What does God want from you? He wants your heart. And when He has your heart, you walk humbly with your God. You surrender and you keep on surrendering.

Have you ever heard of Lt. Hiroo Onada? He was the last World War 2 Japanese soldier to surrender. It happened on March 10, 1974 almost thirty years after World War 2 ended. Lt. Onada had been left on the Philippine island of Lubang on Christmas Day of 1944 with the command to carry on the mission even if Japan surrendered. Four other Japanese soldiers were left when the Japanese army evacuated the island. One soldier surrendered in 1950. Another was killed in a skirmish with local police in 1954. Another was killed in 1972.

Lt. Onada continued his war alone. All efforts to get him to surrender or to capture him failed. He ignored all the messages from loudspeakers telling him that Japan had surrendered and that Japan was now an ally of the United States. Leaflets were dropped over the jungle encouraging him to surrender so he could return to Japan. But Lt. Onada refused to surrender. Over the years he lived off the land and raided the fields and gardens of local citizens. He was responsible for killing at least 30 people during his 29 year personal war. Almost half a million dollars was spent trying to locate him and convince him to surrender. 13,000 men were used over the years trying to locate him. Finally on March 10, 1974, Lt. Hiroo Onada surrendered his rusty sword after receiving a personal command from his former superior officer who read the terms of the cease fire order. Lt. Onada handed his sword to then Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos who officially pardoned him. Lt. Onada’s war was finally over. He was 22 years old when he was left on Lubang. He returned to Japan a prematurely aged man of 52. He said, “Nothing pleasant happened in the jungle for those 29 years.” It occurs to me that there all too many people who, like Lt. Onada, are fighting a lonely battle against God. God has already won the war and is offering them reconciliation and peace. But they foolishly refuse to surrender.

What does God want from you? Yes, He wants your heart. That means that He wants you to act justly. Integrity. He wants you to love mercy. Compassion. He wants you to walk humbly with your God. Surrender.