

What
is
Good
to
God

2018 Lent Devotional

He has shown you,
O mortal, 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.

Micah 6:8

For centuries, Christians have set aside the several weeks leading up to Easter Sunday as a time to prepare spiritually for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. This period of time, known as Lent, is intended to help people focus on the grace and mercy that God has shown us by forgiving our sins – and also to help people sharpen their focus on what it means to follow Jesus all throughout the year.

During our observance of Lent this year, we are calling our church family to focus on the declaration made by the prophet Micah in Micah 6:8. As we focus on what it means to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God, we hope that the Lord will use our Sunday worship services to help us vividly understand what it means to follow Jesus in these important, foundational ways. Make plans to join us every Sunday for worship during the Lent season!

In addition, members of our Ministry Leadership Team have contributed to this personal devotional guide which can be used throughout Lent. The devotional writings, in addition to the questions for further study and reflection, are meant to help you personally apply the truth of God's Word to your everyday life. We encourage you to use this guide often in the days leading up to Easter Sunday – and pray that, as you use this resource, God will help you understand like never before what we are called to be and to do as followers of Jesus Christ.

May these weeks of spiritual reflection, confession, and preparation be spiritually enriching for all of us! And, as a result, may we respond to God with reverent worship and joyful gratitude for all that he is, and all that he has done for us....

ACT JUSTLY by Jason Carter

Week 1: beginning February 18

Day 1

What is justice? We all think we know what it means and we all have our ideas with respect to how “justice is served”. But in the scriptures, justice is no small concept, and when you dig in to it, you find that understanding justice is more than “fairness” (Deuteronomy 25:13-16) and is complex and layered.

Since all of what we know about right and wrong comes from the very nature and character of God, we have to understand justice as that which conforms to and follows from his will. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” So to understand justice, we must understand where it comes from and who defines it. Justice begins with holiness (Micah 6:8, 1 Thes 2:10), and what or who is more holy than our God? Doing justice is the opposite of doing sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20), so it isn’t merely mental, emotional, or verbal agreement with an idea, but actually involves action. In short, justice is the character and nature of God in all his wisdom and righteousness lived out in the lives of his followers.

But as we dig deeper, we find what can appear to be some tensions in the scriptures with respect to justice. Firstly, we certainly see the punitive aspect of justice. Justice can describe a particular way of punishing moral failure (Exodus 9:27, Luke 23:41) because God cannot ignore evil (Habakkuk 1:13).

Secondly, we also see the redemptive aspect of justice. This is God’s divine pity, love, and grace at work. David’s prayer in Psalm 51 is a petition of undeserved pardon for his awful sins against Uriah and Bathsheba. At work here is God’s promise of gracious salvation.

Thirdly, we see the imparted aspect of justice on his people. God is just, so those who believe and follow are just (Habakkuk 2:4). This is given to us *through* our faith, not *because* of it. It doesn’t come from our good works, but from our humble dependence on God’s mercy (Isaiah 64:6).

The tension arises when we consider that, on the one hand, justice is the response to moral failure, but on the other hand, justice forgives the same moral failure. The answer, of course, is the life, death, and victory of Jesus Christ! He the recipient of punitive justice (paying the price for our sins), the arbiter of redemptive justice (forgiving our sins), and the one who imparts his justice to us (so that we may then live justly).

So this week, as we begin our journey into learning “What Is Good to God”, and consider what it means to “Act Justly” (Micah 6:8), we will look at how justice, in all its aspects, is at the core of God’s being. Next week we’ll look at how we are to live with justice at the core of our being. Take some time today to pray that the Lord will use this series to help you understand his heart for justice, discern his moving in your life in this series, and how you can follow him more as a result.

Day 2

Read: Psalm 103:1-12

- Take a few minutes and consider, journal, and/or pray through the ways compassion and justice are intermingled in these verses. How does this inform your understanding of justice?

Day 3

Read: Psalm 11

- Which of the aspects of justice in day 1 do you see at work here?
- David wisely avoided trouble, but also didn’t fearfully run away from trouble when it found him. Pray today for the assurance of God’s strength and presence to face your troubles.

Day 4

Read: Psalm 97

- What are all the attributes of God represented here? What does the mention of God’s justice alongside these other attributes tell you about the nature of his justice?
- What are the the attributes of God’s people represented here?
- What is one of these attributes you might pray for the Lord to help you grow in your life?

Day 5

Read: Isaiah 1:13-17

- Why is the people’s worship unacceptable to God?
- What does God say will make their worship acceptable?
- What does this say about God’s character and expression of justice?

Day 6

Read: Psalm 89:14-18

- Take some time to consider, journal and/or pray through how God’s righteousness/justice and love/faithfulness are not disparate attributes, but how they are complementary.
- What is the expected response of the worshiper to these attributes?

ACT JUSTLY by Dan Hays

Week 2: beginning February 25

Injustice - in all its forms - should be a revolting, noxious odor to us as followers of Jesus! Think about this – what would you do if there was a bad nasty smelling skunk running loose in your house? Would you pretend it wasn't there, trying your hardest to ignore the stench? Would you simply give up, figuring there is no hope of eradicating the little beast? Would you try to convince yourself that the smell of the skunk is really not that bad? No, no, and no!!! I know for a fact not one of us would make any of those choices. We would do whatever it took to get rid of that Pepe Le Pew, or should we say "pee-yew!!!!"

In God's nostrils, injustice is exactly that – the worst smelling skunk you could ever imagine. God hates injustice; it's not something he ignores or concedes or down plays. He is fierce against it.

To help drive home this point, let me take you back to a childhood memory. My brother and I, along with some friends, were out playing in the woods behind our house. Everything came to a halt when several teenagers showed up to bully us around. For some reason they turned their attention toward my brother and soon you could tell he was about to get beat up. What happened next is etched in my mind in super, slow motion detail. As I looked back to our house I saw my dad running towards us like he was a world class Olympic sprinter; it looked like there was fire in his eyes! My dad was on the way; and he was about to make all things right.

That is the kind of picture we can have of our Heavenly Father when it comes to injustice. With a "fire in his eyes" kind of intensity, he is a "God of justice." And he commands the same from each of us as his followers. As Micah 5:8 says, this is what the Lord "REQUIRES" of you – to *act justly*... This is not optional. This is at the very heart of the Lord and it must be at the core of our lives as Christians.

Meditate on this – as Christians we should be on the leading edge of promoting and pursuing justice! We should be like my dad, eyes on fire, determined to defend and help those who are hurting or oppressed.

Stop for a moment and consider this – what are the skunks of injustice in our world today? Then, make this even more personal – what are the skunks of injustice you are smelling in your own day-to-day life? Reflect and pray over what you should do – what steps can you take today and this week to pursue justice?

This week we will walk through several Bible passages that speak into how we can and should pursue justice and seek to remove the skunks of injustice. Dive in to these and really seek the heart of the Lord!

Day 2

Read: Isaiah 58:1-7 - People of God should recoil & boil at all forms of injustice!

- As this passage begins, we see the Israelites frustrated with God's silence and lack of interest with their fasting. What is the problem with their fasting; why is it so distasteful to the Lord?
- What kind of fasting is actually impressive to God?
- Take time to confess ways you have not lived out the spirit of these verses. Pray fervently for a heart that recoils and boils toward injustice. Pray passionately for those who are even now facing forms of injustice.

Day 3

Read: Isaiah 58:8-14 - People of God should shine brightly as rebuilders & restorers of justice!

- What happens when the people of God stand up for justice? What are the results?
- Why is action towards justice connected to people having hope? How have you experienced that yourself?
- What can you personally do this week to be described as a "rebuilder" and "restorer" of justice? Are these words people would use to describe you now? Reflect and pray over this.

Day 4

Read: Luke 10:25-37 - People of God should recognize & mobilize justice!

- What were the various responses to the skunk of injustice in this parable? How would you describe some of the excuses given for non-action?
- How does this parable challenge you personally? What excuses for non-action do you personally struggle with?
- Who is your "neighbor" that you can reach out to today?

Day 5

Read: Isaiah 1:10-17 - People of God should seek & speak for justice!

- Read verse 17 several times – meditate on the command to "seek justice." How can you act on this command from God?
- Meditate and reflect on the next command – to encourage the oppressed. How can you act on this command from God?
- Now reflect on the final command – to defend and speak up for the fatherless and widowed. How can you act on this command of God?

Day 6

Read: Amos 5:21-24 - People of God should roar and pour justice!

- Picture yourself next to a rushing river. What does it sound like? Does that sound describe your attitude and pursuit toward justice? If your life was a soundtrack...what would the title be?
- How can you personally be a roaring advocate of justice?
- The river pictured in this passage is flourishing and life-giving. How can you be that kind of river to other people this week?

LOVE MERCY by Martha Dondit

Week 3: beginning March 4

Day 1

Micah 6:8 says, *He has shown 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.*

The first time I remember reading this verse, I thought, "This is my dad; this is such a good description of my father." I am blessed to have grown up with a man who walked humbly with his God. And because he did, it was second nature to him to act justly and to extend mercy to all he met.

My dad loved mercy. He loved it because he understood that he had been mercifully dealt with by his God. He understood his depravity as a sinner and how far short he fell from God's holy standard. God had been merciful to him; he would be merciful to others. He understood the inherent dignity of those he came into contact with because God had created them in his image. And so he noticed their needs. I believe that's a requirement of loving mercy. You can't love it, you can't extend it, unless you know what people lack, why they're hurting and in what ways you can meet their needs.

I find it curious that God, through this verse, cautions us to act justly, but when it comes to mercy, we are not only to act mercifully; we are to love mercy. Why the extravagance? Perhaps because of God's extravagant mercy extended to us. Are we ever more like God than when extending mercy to others? Mercy, or goodness and kindness as it means in this usage, became a way of life for my dad.

As a young soldier in WWII, he noticed the needs of displaced peoples. Stationed in Paris following an injury, he worked with men who had to flee their countries and scratch a living for themselves and their families if they were fortunate enough to have brought them along.

He noticed they came to work hungry, not earning enough for 3 squares. He found a way to feed them each day, to get shoes to them when theirs fell apart. He extended this type of mercy all throughout his life. There are rewards to this kind of living: friendships, free tutoring in math from a PHD from the University of Krakow, chess games with an Irish chess master. How many can boast playing with a chess master? (He lost soundly every time). But perhaps the greatest reward to living as God requires is ironically the requirement itself, the privilege of walking humbly with God in this earthly life.

Day 2

Read: Romans 12:1-2 NIV

How should we respond to God's mercy?

Day 3

Read: Luke 6:35-36 NIV

Why are we to show mercy to others?

Day 4

Read: Romans 12:8 NIV

To what is mercy linked?

How does this impact how you will show mercy to others?

Day 5

Read: Psalm 85:10 KJV

What does it mean to you that God's mercy and his truth are connected?

Day 6

Read: James 3:17 NIV

Mercy falls under a bigger umbrella; what is it a part of?

Read: Luke 1:50 NAS

What promise does this verse give to a believer's children?

LOVE MERCY by JP Mertens

Week 4: beginning March 11

Day 1

When Jesus was on his journey toward Jerusalem to suffer the indescribable pain and abandonment of the cross and to experience God's full mercy and victory through the resurrection, he came across a man who desperately needed God's mercy (Luke 18: 35-43). Bartimaeus was blind since birth and had to survive by begging for the generosity of others. When he heard from the crowds that Jesus was passing by, he cried out in complete desperation, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18: 38). In the midst of hundreds of people crowding in on him, Jesus stopped for a moment to focus on this blind man's urgent shouts for help. Jesus had compassion on Bartimaeus, whom society deemed a "nobody". Jesus reached out to this man, extended his divine powers, and demonstrated his mercy by giving this man sight. Just imagine what it was like with this man to see the world for the first time! Just imagine what it was like for this man to get a chance at life. Just imagine what it was like for this man who had lost all hope to have his dreams come true. Jesus is still in the business of giving mercy today.

Four years ago, my father passed away due to a destructive brain aneurysm, at the young age of 61. As my family buried my father, I cried out to the Lord to have mercy on me. How would I be able to make it through life and ministry without my father's love and wisdom? To whom could I go when I needed advice on marriage, fatherhood, ministry, or life? I felt like the blind man trying to find my way in the dark, completely hopeless.

I am sure you have experienced these feelings in your own way on your own journey. When we cry out to God for mercy, he responds in a way that works out best for our good and for his glory. First, there are times when God chooses to deliver us from the difficult or challenging situation we are facing. God did not bring my father back in physical form to live like his brain aneurysm never happened, but we trusted the Lord.

Second, there are times when God chooses not to deliver us from our tough circumstances because he has a better plan than what we can see. I remember the classic Garth Brooks song with the lyrics, "Thank God for Unanswered Prayers". Tough times urge us to wait on God, to bring out his better plan, in his perfect timing. God used my father's death to draw us even closer together as a family as we leaned on each other and God.

Third, there are times where God has mercy on us by keeping us in the difficult situations, to help draw us closer to him. It is extremely difficult to remain in the pain, but we can trust that God is working in the pain to

bring us closer to him. As I am grieving my father's death, I am discovering God as my ultimate Heavenly Father as he is carrying me through life and ministry without my earthly father.

As you walk through the dark times of life, desperately cry out to Jesus for mercy, just like Bartimaeus, trusting that the Lord will show you his mercy in his best way that is best for you.

Day 2

Read: Psalm 86:5

- What does God do when you cry out to him for mercy?
- How has God shown you mercy in the last few days

Day 3

Read: Psalm 145:9

- Why is God's compassion so perfect and profound?
- How have you tasted God's compassion?
- Where do you need to experience God's compassion in your life?

Day 4

Read: Ephesians 2:4

- How is God "rich in mercy"?
- How are God's grace and mercy linked?
- What does it look like to be made alive in Christ?

Day 5

Read: Titus 3:5

- Why did Jesus choose to give his life for sinful people?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in our renewal?
- Why should we trust in God's mercy?

Day 6

Read: Hebrews 4:16

- Why is it meaningful for us today that Jesus is our High Priest?
- Why is it significant that Jesus was without sin?
- How can Jesus help us when we are tempted to sin?
- How does Jesus show us mercy and grace in our time of need?

Read: I Peter 1:3

- What is the hope we have in Jesus? What is our spiritual inheritance?
- What is the coming salvation that will be revealed in the end? How does that make you feel?
- Why are you grateful for God's mercy? How do you need God's mercy today?

WALK HUMBLY by Aaron Mead

Week 5: beginning March 18

Day 1

In Micah we are told to "Walk humbly with your God." Humility is such an important aspect of our Christian faith and I want to highlight two main things about this command. First is the pace of the command...walking. In our day-to-day lives we live fast-paced ever going lives; we go from activity to activity; commitment to commitment. Our lives are hectic and this scripture is telling us to slow down and walk. One of the greatest things about walking is that you don't miss anything. You get to enjoy the moment. You get to really experience the scenery and the place you are in life. God wants us walk with him; enjoy life with him.

Second is the object of the command. Not only are we told to slow down our life, but we have to look at who we are walking with. We are to walk humbly with God. Everyone has that one friend who always walks a little faster. Maybe they have longer legs, but they leave you behind. "Hello, I am back here! I thought we were going together." God wants us walk with him; enjoy life with him.

Often in our lives we think that we can go on ahead of God. Our pride gets in the way, we think that we know best, and our agenda becomes more important than God's. But nothing could be farther from the truth. God is leading our path. How can we follow him if we always try to outrun him?

My challenge for the week is to find one way to put God and others before yourself. For example, before you check your phone in the morning...pray, spend time walking with God. How about instead of quickly eating lunch and running off to do other activities, invite someone to lunch with you and hear their story. We have to humble ourselves knowing that we aren't in control but we have the opportunity to walk with the One who is.

Day 2

1 Peter 5:6-7

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Song: *Find Me*, Bethel Worship

Day 3

Colossians 3:12

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Song: *Here is my Heart*, Casting Crowns

Day 4

Ephesians 4:2

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

Song: *We All Bleed the Same*, Mandisa w/ Toby Mac

Day 5

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

Song: *Broken Things*, Matthew West

Day 6

Philippians 2:3-4

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

Song: *Do Something*, Matthew West

WALK HUMBLY by Cara Bruinius

Week 6: beginning March 25

Day 1

Read: Philippians 2:3-11

The focus of this week will be Jesus. If we remember Jesus in our day-to-day, moment by moment, (Philippians 2:3), it not only benefits our relationship with him, this becomes a means to unity with other believers. When we lose the focus on ourselves and place it on Jesus, on others, we begin to have the appearance of Jesus. We strip all the masks off, we stop the "I'm fine", and we get real. Our focus lifts off ourselves, not just looking after our own interests, (verse 4) but focusing on the lives of others. Paul doesn't give us a choice here. You must think and act like Jesus. So we come to the life of Jesus and we see the Son of Man, who let go of being God, (verse 6), gave up everything, emptied himself. I'm sure we will never understand what that means. Truly.

Let's be honest. We can't empty ourselves of godlike qualities, for we have none. He took on the form of servant and became a man, humbled himself and fully obedient to God (verses 7-8). So, for us, to be like Jesus, becoming a servant, humbling ourselves and obeying God's word for our life no matter the cost. Our best life lived is one following the footsteps of Jesus. For Jesus there was only one road: Calvary. It was obedience with the highest cost yet blessing upon blessing for all of mankind.

Because of this, God gave Jesus the name that is above every name, greater than every name (verse 9-10). Jesus humbled. God lifted up. (Philippians 2:10-11) *"so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Christ Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Jesus was *"...no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him."* (Isaiah 53:2).

We could identify with him. He is real to us and we gravitate to real.

Life has trials, tribulations, heartaches, yet, we can be confident.

The only firm ground is Jesus. He isn't finished with us yet. Praise Jesus for that bit of real.

Song: *Unfinished*, Mandisa

Day 2

Read: Romans 15:1-3

We do a decent job of seeing the sins of others, yet when it comes to our sin, our mistakes seem a little less problematic. Instead of this mindset, Paul has a strong message for you and me. Have THIS attitude, it's different. Now, we who are strong (or have faith), ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

Song: *Song of Moses*, Ben & Kelly Smith

Day 3

Read: Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 20:16 AMP

The attitude of Jesus. The noise of this world, of worry, of fear begins with taking his yoke upon me. Following him. Being his disciple. Jesus has gentle, humble leadership. We follow and we humble ourselves in his name.

Song: *He Leadeth Me*, JH Gilmore

Day 4

Read: John 1:1; Revelation 19:13

Jesus, our example, existed as the Word, LORD of LORDs in the beginning and he set the equality with God aside to be with us on earth. he humbled; he emptied himself to be with us. "*Though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich, abundantly blessed.*" (2 Corinthians 8:9). There are days when we just need to bask in the truth that we are rich because of the truth of the GOSPEL. Can you set aside some time today and reflect of the richness of the gospel in your life?

Song: *Stars, Skillet*

Day 5

Read: John 10:14-18

Jesus became man. Do we forget the amazing sacrifice of just this? Do we forget the horrors of humanness? And as we turn our eyes to the cross and resurrection, remember this today. He deserves the glory, He deserves the worship, He deserves our lives in humble submission. Allow me to remind you...he was not murdered...he was not slain...he willingly gave up his life...he decided when to take his last breath...and he decided when it was FINISHED.

Song: *In the Name of Love*, SIBKL Worship

Day 6

Read: Hebrews 2:14-18; Psalm 139:1-6

Think of humbling yourself as a child walking in the large footsteps of the father in snow. He jumps from footprint to footprint to keep up. Yet, the child relies entirely on the father, he does not know where the father goes. He relies on the father for food, for shelter, for love. Humble yourself today as a child. Jesus knows the trials of humanness.

Song: *New Day*, Blake Whiteley & Brianna Caprice



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