

DETOUR TO THE PROPHETS: MICAH

by Michele Hershberger

KEY VERSE:

Micah 6:8

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?

FAITH STORY:

Micah 6:6-8

FAITH FOCUS:

Micah of Moresheth proclaimed God's word of judgment and hope to the people of Judah before the Babylonian exile. In this passage Micah helped people see that worship must be tied to justice and obedience or it was not true worship. Worshippers could give thousands of rivers of oil or even their own children as a sacrifice, but unless they were practicing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God, none of their worship mattered.

SESSION GOAL:

Encourage students to commit themselves to worship God by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will have:

- List various sacrifices made to God
- Look up Bible verses and then define the phrases "doing justice," "loving kindness," and "walking humbly with God"
- Discuss and write down ways to improve worship in their congregation
- Formulate an action plan for putting more justice into their worship

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles
- 2 White board, chalkboard or easel paper and appropriate writing utensils
- 3 The movie, Terminal, showing chapter 18 (where Victor helps a Russian man be able to keep the medicine for his sick father)
- 4 Ask 2-3 students to prepare a prayer ahead of time for the Respond time. Give them the example prayer as a way to jumpstart their creativity.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–7 minutes)

Gather the students together with this opening question. *“What is the biggest sacrifice you ever made to God or that you have ever seen being made to God by someone else?”* As they think, write down these categories on a white board: Wealth, Family, Time, Other. Ask the students to share their answers and as they do, write their answers down under the proper category. Now ask, *“Was this sacrifice a one time gift or do you or the others you observed continue to sacrifice this much?”*

CONNECT: (10 minutes)

Ask the youth to sit in silence and think about what God really wants. Ask them to come up with one word that would say what they think God wants from them. Share these words around the circle.

Now show a clip from the movie *The Terminal*. This movie tells the story of an East European man who gets stuck in an American airport for reasons that have nothing to do with him. This clip shows how he works to help another man and illustrates true justice. Show chapter 18 of the movie (on DVD).

Say, *“Sometimes it seems hard to know what God really wants. Giving God what he wants and deserves is worship. How can we best worship God? The prophet Micah may have some answers.”*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–17 minutes)

Begin this time with a mini-lecture on how worship functioned in the ancient world. (See Insights from Scripture) Make these points:

- In almost every religion, animal and grain sacrifices were very important.
- In almost every ancient religion, the worshippers were supposed to give the first of their crops or baby animals. This was to show their god how much trust they had, for there was no guarantee that the rest of the crop or the flock would produce.
- In most religions (except the worship of the LORD as we know it in the Bible) the best sacrifice was offering up your firstborn child, burning them to the gods as the ultimate commitment. We cannot fault these people who worshipped other gods for being less than totally committed. They loved their children as we love ours, and yet they made the ultimate sacrifice.

Now have the students read Micah 6:6-8. Ask them to point out where they see these aspects of worship mentioned in the text. Then say, *“But in these verses, God pulls a U-turn. God says, ‘I don’t want your sacrifices. I want something else instead . . . for you all to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with me.’”*

Break the students up into three groups. Each group will look at other parts of the Bible to better understand their phrase.

- What does it mean to do justice? Look up Isaiah 1, especially verses 10-17.

- What does it mean to love kindness? Look at Luke 15:11-32. Look specifically at how the older brother reacted to the younger brother. How did he not “love kindness”? (Loving kindness means to love it when someone gets what he or she doesn’t deserve.)
- What does it mean to walk humbly with God? Look up I Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, Deut. 10:12-13 and Hebrews 11:8. Walking humbly with God is a vivid word picture that the Israelites used to communicate obedience.

Bring the groups back together and have them report. Make sure that all the students understand the true meaning of the three phrases. Wrap the conversation up helping the students make this connection. *“For God, true worship must always be tied to justice. Do we then, in our church and as youth, practice true worship?”*

APPLY: (10 minutes)

Write these three phrases on the white board: Doing Justice, Loving Kindness and Walking Humbly with God. Ask the students to brainstorm ways that the congregation does these three things. Ask how the youth themselves do these things. List those activities and attitudes under the right category. Then ask, *“Which category is weakest for our church? What can we do to better worship God in this category?”* Continue to write down their ideas as they discuss how justice, grace and obedience find their way into your congregational life.

RESPOND: (9 minutes)

Work with the youth to write up a plan for making one change in congregational life that would enhance worship. If appropriate, share this plan with the elders and pastors of your church (but work to make sure this written plan is not mean-spirited or too confrontive). Remind the students that God wants justice even more than incredible sacrifices—more than thousands of rivers of oil.

Ask the students who prepared a prayer for the closing time to lead you. Or use the prayer that follows:

Oh Lord, we stand before you.

What would you have us stand before you with?

Money?

Our time?

Our talent?

All those things are good, Lord.

But they are nothing if we don’t ...

Do justice ...

Love it when people get what they don’t deserve ...

And go wherever you go, in obedience to you.

Help us do justice.

Help us give others grace.

Help us walk in faith and humility, in obedience to you.

Amen.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

Micah of Moresheth prophesied during the reigns of three Judean kings: Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was probably most active during Hezekiah's reign (Jer. 26:18).

In this prophetic oracle, Micah described what the LORD really desired from the people in worship. All the elements of ancient worship are featured here: bowing before God, offering calves or other burnt offerings, bringing rams and oil. The worship acts themselves get bigger and demand more commitment. They move from offering a burnt offering to giving thousands of rivers of oil—an impossible task. The ultimate sacrifice in the ancient world was the sacrifice of the firstborn child, and this sacrifice is mentioned last in the sequence. Many religions practiced child sacrifice, an act of worship that God hated (Jer. 19:5). Religious commitment in the Old Testament world was not the problem; worshipping the wrong god was.

But none of these worship practices meant anything in isolation, said Micah. While there is nothing wrong with burnt offering per se, real worship must have three elements: people who practice justice, people who love kindness, and people who walk humbly with God.

The justice here is shalom justice. God wants everyone to have shalom, which includes peace with God, peace with other people, peace within ourselves and peaceful living with all of creation. Shalom means that everyone has enough to eat, dignified labor and a decent house to live in. So if someone in the community is hungry, no one has shalom. In shalom justice, people get what they need, not necessarily what they deserve (as contrasted to the American justice system).

To love kindness means to love it when people get what they don't deserve. Closely related to shalom justice, this concept is another way of understanding grace. God's grace to us is always undeserved. Jesus continues to promote this concept of loving kindness with the stories of the Prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32, where the older brother doesn't love kindness) and the parable of the workers, where the people who only work an hour get the same wage as those who work all day (Matthew 20:1-16).

Walking humbly with God is a vivid word picture the Hebrews used to describe obedience. Instead of using an abstract term such as the word obedience, they understood that to obey God meant to walk—humbly—wherever God went.

These three concepts helped explain true worship to God's people, and to us today as well.