

New Interpreter's Bible:

*The Old Testament book of Micah is attributed to a Judean prophet from 750 BC. It numbers sixth among the twelve minor prophets. Like some other brief biblical books, it is sometimes overlooked. We know very little about the prophet Micah but some of his words are well known.*

Let us now turn to some of those words in Micah 6:6-8

<sup>6</sup>“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

<sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

<sup>8</sup>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?

This is one of my favorite texts. I remember learning it as part of a song when I was a teenager and it has stayed with me all these years. I often reflect on this verse as a source of guidance.

Several years ago there were those popular WWJD bracelets....What Would Jesus Do? As we read in our first scripture reading, JC would want us to love our neighbors as ourselves. That is treat others the way we want to be treated.

Micah phrases the question a little differently....What does the Lord want you to do?

He then follows the question with a three part answer.

To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

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Let's talk about the first part.....

To do justice - The word Do is an action verb –

This action is not only about what we think, or what we believe.....it is about what we do and about what we put into practice!

In 2003, Chris Rock starred in a movie called "Head of State" - in this movie he played an unlikely presidential nominee who ran a campaign focusing on fixing those things wrong with the American society. During campaign stops, he would discuss the problem and then insert his catchy tag line....That ain't right!

In the same way, when you see something....when you observe something and your gut tells you...in fact you're your gut yells at you....That ain't right! That should be a sign....a signal of the presence of an injustice and an opportunity for you to DO. Your gut is telling you this is an opportunity for you to reverse an unfairness.

In 2001, a grassroots effort was launched by a few to bring attention to the unfavorable working conditions and low wages of the tomato pickers in Southern Florida used by a distributor of Taco Bell.

Their initial effort eventually gained steam at the presbytery level and then the entire Presbyterian Church USA took note and joined with other religious organizations to boycott Taco Bell.

After a year or two of the boycott, the two sides were able to mediate and

reach an agreement for better working conditions and wages. All because a few saw an injustice and chose to DO.

A couple of months ago we all sat in the comforts of our homes and saw on TV the utter devastation of the tornadoes in Oklahoma.

These people did not self inflict this damage....it just happened.....and that wasn't fair. When people recognized this injustice they chose to DO. Some were able to donate money, others donated articles of clothing, water, and cleaning supplies.

Some had the flexibility in their schedule so they, like our very own Ann Waddle, loaded up their car with supplies and went to Oklahoma to DO.

When asked about her trip, Ann quickly shared how important it was that she had such wonderful support from the church--SS classes and individuals sent money she used to buy supplies for families; lots of individuals gave snacks and tools that she served to workers and victims; and several folks provided items for her--such as air mattress, cooler, etc.

What opportunities do you have to DO justice?

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The second part of the answer.....To love Kindness

That is taking action to help someone in need. Or in some instances, taking the initiative that anticipates a need, even when help is not requested.

The word LOVE is the action verb.....however...

THIS is one we constantly mess up....

I mean, it is easy to love your dog, your favorite candy bar, or your favorite chair....but what about those around us.....

- like the neighbor who plays their music too loud or
- The person who brings tuna for lunch and eats it in the lounge?
- How about the person who cuts you off in traffic or
- the person who has the audacity to take 20 items in the express lane at the grocery store?
- And don't forget about those that dress differently.....talk differently.....think differently.....and act differently?

If pressed, you could probably add other qualifiers.....

After all, it is such a simple statement....to love kindness....yet so hard to actually do.

The text doesn't ask or even hint at the notion that we should put conditions on our love.....but we do. The text does not say to love only those that act like and think like us....but we tend to fall into that trap.

It simply says to love.

This is where we need to pay attention to and learn from the children. If you want to see unbiased love.....go observe a Kindergarten class at recess.

It doesn't matter your sex, age, color or creed...they just want someone to play with....and if someone falls down. There is always plenty of help to walk that child over to the teacher. The children get this one right.

What opportunities do you have to LOVE kindness?

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The third part.....To walk humbly with your God –

This is the action taken as one walks WITH God while submitting to His teachings and guidance.

Of all the people you regularly interact with....Who is the person you would describe as selfless and Christ-like?

Who is the person who constantly professes their faith through their actions?

That is someone walking humbly with God.

What opportunities do you have to WALK humbly with your God?

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You may see some of the youth wearing their red t-shirts from their recent mission trip.....the words on the front of their shirts state it best....

I am loved; therefore, I serve

3 weeks ago, 15 youth and 4 adults loaded up on the church bus and headed to WV. We were going to work through an organization called WV Mission and Advocacy.

Let me share an excerpt from their website which reads as follows....(HOLD UP a COPY TO READ)

*Micah 6:8 is the theology of WV Mission and Advocacy Workcamp. We believe that doing justice is bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, between those who may have skills or abilities and those who need assistance, between those who are victims of disaster and those who are able to reach out.*

*Loving kindness is about building relationship. Mission is far more than **DOING**, it is also about **BEING**. Kindness is often translated as mercy—walking in someone else's shoes. This is a reminder that we don't do things for "those people" but we walk side by side with all of God's people.*

*Walking humbly with God is a reminder that it is not about us, it is about God. Being humble is not thinking less of ourselves as much as it is just not thinking of ourselves at all. That is when God can really use us in service!*

Wow....what a belief statement for a mission organization!!!!

Well, we arrived and set up camp in the fellowship hall and Sunday school rooms of the First Baptist Church of Webster Springs, WV. The town is quaint.....population of 775. It has been experiencing a rough patch with the closure of two coal mines in recent years.

Sunday afternoon, Mikey and I went with our site coordinator to visit our work site. That is when we met the O'Dell's. Dennis and Miss D. Their homestead was at the end of a long and windy road.....the place where the pavement stops and the dirt road begins.

This is where Miss D and her 11 siblings grew up....160 acres of gorgeous West Virginia hills. The house sits on a flat piece of land at the bottom of the holler surrounded by a stream, 4 vegetable gardens and Miss D's day lilies. She had every color in the rainbow and they were in full bloom.

Their house was originally a single-wide trailer but had been doubled in size in recent years with some room additions.

They were excited to see us and share with us their story. You see, when Super Storm Sandy came on shore last year it slammed the East coast with wind, rain, and a powerful storm surge.

Well, by the time it made it over this little holler in West Virginia, it was snowing. I am sure they thought it was gorgeous as it laid in the grass and on the trees. But as the inches turned into feet they began to worry. It didn't stop snowing until it was over 50 inches deep.....yes, I said 5 – 0 Fifty inches.

That day, Dennis heard some noise and went to look, by the time he realized what was happening there was no stopping it. The weight of the snow collapsed the roof of their house. Everything they owned was under a mess of shattered beams, roofing, and snow.

Days turned into weeks and weeks into months. In April, they were able to begin to rebuild. Family and friends helped them clean up the mess, strip the walls down to the studs, and build a new roof. This is a slow process as they work to live while trying to save money to make the necessary repairs. A few weeks later a group of men from Nebraska showed up and helped to start to hang the new drywall.

A couple of weeks later, we show up. Dennis later told me that when we arrived with 15 teenagers he was hopeful that some work would be accomplished but not sure how much the teens would actually be able to do.

On Monday, we arrived on our worksite. Our plan was to work on hanging drywall as well as tackle a few other tasks. The first day is always slow as it takes a little while to unload the tools, assign tasks, and then instruct each one of the youth how to complete their task.

After an hour, you could see youth sanding the joints that had been completed by the men from Nebraska and also taping and mudding the joints left unfinished. They also began to measure, cut, and hang new drywall in the remaining 2 ½ rooms. The youth worked when they needed too and rested when necessary. I loved hearing them say, “what can I do now?”

Dennis has gout and faces periods of severe pain and was unable to help. He simply sat and watched the youth work. However, he was always willing to talk to any of them who needed to sit and rest. Miss D was energetic and worked right alongside the youth. As we cleaned up to head out for the day Miss D hugged everyone’s neck.

Back at the church, the youth had to alternate between various tasks of meal preparation and clean up.

Day number two continued much in the same manner; however, the youths level of proficiency increased. They needed less supervision as they knew the basics of how to measure, cut, hang, tape, mud, and sand drywall.

If they needed assistance they asked. This increased level of proficiency allowed time for Mikey to lead a few youth to tackle some other tasks.

Did you know that some of the youth actually loved crawling under the house in the crawl space to assist with shoring up the floor? However, one youth did not like it and flat out told him....never again!

By day three, some of the youth were able to begin to lay some new sub flooring that would eventually be the underlayment for the new laminate tile. The rest continued with the multi step process of hanging the drywall and preparing it to be painted.

Day number four was our final work day. On this day, the youth finished hanging the last piece of drywall and the tapers and mudders finished their tasks. Some of the youth continued to work on the floor, while others assisted with hauling off debris from the collapse, painting the first room with

primer, and a couple of other miscellaneous tasks.

At the end of the day, we gathered in the living room with Dennis. Miss D had already hugged everyone's neck as she had driven off an hour or two before with a load of debris to the landfill. As we sat there, I explained to the youth how proud myself, Mikey, Maggie, and Kristi were with the work they had done.

I then shared with them something I had privilege of observing that morning.

As I returned from unlocking the house, I turned and saw the youth starting to exit the bus....as they were exiting, I could here them singing a song that was playing on the radio.

I stood there in the side yard and could see the house the youth had been working on and the youth exiting the bus for their final day of work. The song that was playing on the radio was HOME – you have probably heard it.....it became popular last year during the Olympics when NBC used it as a

theme song for the women's gymnastics segments. It has also been used since then in many commercials. Here, let me play a small segment

**hold iPad up to mic and play the 15 seconds of the song??????**

I stood there listening to them sing those same lyrics you just heard.....

"You know you are not alone, I'm gonna make this place your home!"

Though, the interesting thing is....they had been singing that song all week.....except the I was a collective WE.....when they arrived on Monday, their presence affectionately told Dennis and Miss D that they were not alone. They then worked all week to do their part to help turn that once crumpled structure back into their home.

As we sat in that room, a 64 year old man wept as he verbalized his appreciation for what those teenagers had actually done for them.

You see.....those youth gave up a weeks worth of their summer vacation to DO, LOVE, and WALK

It just wasn't fair that the snow accumulated and collapsed Dennis and Mrs. Dee's house.....why them? We don't know why and never will.

But I do know.....without a doubt, that those 15 youth DID their part, to LOVE Dennis and Miss D all while WALKING

humbly with their God in midst of that holler in WV.

As you depart from here today.....

How can you DO justice.....How can you LOVE kindness.....How can you WALK humbly with your God?