

Shalom!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

Summer 2023 VOL. 43, NO. 3

Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly

JUST WHEN YOU think social media is a waste of time, something shows up in the middle of scrolling that you didn't ask for but turns out to be helpful. This time it was an ad for a new book called *Social Justice for the Sensitive Soul: How to Change the World in Quiet Ways*, by Dorcas Cheng-Tozun (Broadleaf Books, 2023). The title and description sound a lot like me: "Social justice work, we often assume, is raised voices and raised fists. It involves leading, advocating, and organizing whatever is required—in the streets, villages, inner cities, halls of political power, and more. But what does social justice work look like for those of us who aren't comfortable battling in the trenches?"

In the introduction, Cheng-Tozun says, "This book is for anyone interested in engaging with social justice who identifies as sensitive, empathic, quiet, introverted, or melancholic." As an introvert, and usually fairly quiet and (I hope) empathic, I recognize myself and often feel like my passion for social justice hasn't often translated itself into effective action partly because I'm uncomfortable with many of the traditional tools of social justice activism. But Cheng-Tozun has good news, and spends much of the book encouraging "sensitive souls" to embrace their own unique gifts and not try to be something they aren't. She describes various possibilities for effective and necessary action that is not always seen as social justice work. There are the connectors, creatives, record keepers, builders, equippers, and researchers who often work behind the scenes doing work that is absolutely neces-

sary but often not as visible and obvious.

You might be wondering: What does this book have to do with this edition of *Shalom!*? Obviously, there is a word in common: justice. Justice, social or otherwise, is central to the biblical message. In fact, it's mentioned in Deuteronomy and Micah—along with fearing God, serving God with all your heart and soul, keeping God's commandments and decrees, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. God **requires** justice; it's not an option or something God wishes he could have but doesn't need.

For this edition, a number of pastors do what they do best: explain what Micah means when he says that God requires us to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God" (6:8). Other writers put the verse in the context of daily life with stories of how they are participating in bringing about justice and mercy in people's lives.

In Cheng-Tozun's list of the types of "sensitive souls" who work behind the scenes, I see myself in the "equipper" category. She says, "When sensitive people pass along invaluable knowledge, best practices, research, strategies, ideas, and more, we support others in contributing to the causes we dearly love. By doing so, we give them a better chance of creating change, of nudging all of us toward better, fairer societies." That's some of what I hope happens through *Shalom!*—that you will be better equipped and motivated to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

THIS ISSUE OF SHALOM!

Jonah and the Justice of God 2

What Does It Mean to Be a Micah 6:8 Church? 3

Justice, Mercy, and Foster Care 4

MIDNIGHT MUSINGS 5
Mercy as the Means of Justice

Forty Years of Justice and Mercy 6

Straightening Our Compass Needles 8

Doing Justice Through Open Conversations 9

God's Call for Mishpat, Hesed, and Shalom 10

Reflections on Micah 6:8 12

Jonah and the Justice of God

By David Flowers

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 NIV).

THIS FAMILIAR VERSE is from the LORD to the people of Israel through his prophet Micah, a contemporary with the prophet Jonah when the Neo-Assyrian Empire was on their doorstep. We know from the Scriptures that Assyria's advance was prophesied as a judgment of God because of the injustice of his own people. This is the context of Micah's word from God.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire is considered by historians to be the first real empire the world has ever seen. They were masters of ge-

ographical and political administration. They were the first to have a standing army of several hundred thousand men. They were known for being merciless conquerors. When they defeated a tribe or nation, they would take a portion of their people back to their cities as slaves by hooking them in the nose, lips, and jaws—leading them back like dogs on a leash. The Assyrians were also the first to use a form of crucifixion against their enemies.

In 701 BCE, when they invaded the southern kingdom of Judah, they flayed the Jews there—an event famously depicted on what is known as the Lachish Reliefs, which can be seen today in the British Museum. It was the worst kind of brutality. Of course, like all evil empires, there were regular folks who sought to make a living, provide for their families, create beauty, art, and culture. For example, Nineveh was known for having elaborate parks, gardens, and zoos that housed animals from every corner of the ancient Near East. But that didn't interest Israel. It certainly wasn't the reason Jonah was called by God to go to Nineveh.

These kinds of details don't appear in the book of Jonah and aren't typically shared in a children's Sunday School class. When you know these things and read the whole book of Jonah 4, it's quite clear that it is much more than a children's story. In fact, I believe that this ancient comedy is often oversimplified and misrepresented—from Sunday School teachers to Veggie Tales. As a result, many in the church today have missed its rather sophisticated style and message, which in its original Hebrew uses humor and satire to communicate theological truths and provoke radical obedience from its readers. More specifically, the book challenges our human understanding of justice.

The author does this by telling the story of a reluctant and rebellious prophet who turns out (rather ironically and comically) to be the most successful evangelist in the Old Testament! It's a story about God's mission to save the lost, specifically our enemies. Yes, he loves his people. But he also loves those

who don't know him, particularly those who have given themselves over to violence, corruption, and dehumanizing beliefs and practices. Through this challenging book, the author invites us to look in the mirror and then answer the call to live according to the justice of God and embody his mercy and compassion in the world.

Jonah lived in the eighth century BCE in the time of the divided kingdoms. He was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel at the same time as Amos, as well as Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah in the southern kingdom of Judah. The only other reference to Jonah in the Old Testament is in 2 Kings 14:23-25, and it's not good. The Bible tells us that Jonah speaks favorably of Israel's wicked king Jeroboam II, while his contemporary Amos proclaims judgment.

The book of Jonah begins with this shady prophet being called by God to go speak a word of coming judgment to his enemies in Nineveh, the capital city of the Neo-Assyrian empire, but he instead runs from God. He buys a ticket on a merchant ship full of pagan sailors who were headed for Tarshish—2,500 miles in the opposite direction! Jonah thinks he's outwitted God and feels so good about himself he falls asleep in the hull of the ship.

But then a violent storm comes. These skilled sailors have never seen anything like it. They believe they're all going to die. All they can do is toss over their supplies and cry out to their gods for help. That doesn't appease any of the gods they know. They discover Jonah asleep and unaware of the nightmare they are all living. Jonah finally admits that Yahweh—"the God of the land and the sea"—is upset with him.

Rather than "act justly" by repenting and going to his enemies in Nineveh, Jonah prefers death. So he tells the poor, frightened sailors to throw him overboard. In awe of Jonah's God, they do so reluctantly; the storm stops, and the pagan sailors repent and worship the LORD. The pagans learn about the mercy of God, and Jonah learns that you can run but you can't hide.

In chapter 2, Jonah sinks down into the



Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation is a quarterly publication of the Brethren in Christ Church U.S. Its mission is to educate and stimulate Christ-like responses to the needs of society by providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues.

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Website: bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom

darkness of the sea. Instead of encountering the feared mythological sea monster, Jonah is swallowed by a big fish that is sent by God to serve as a holding place for Jonah. It's there that Jonah prays. Will the belly of the beast be the end of Jonah or a new beginning and rebirth? As pious as his prayer may have sounded, it was missing any signs of confession and repentance. Yet God is merciful and gives Jonah another chance to obey his prophetic calling. After three days in the belly of the beast, God commands the fish to spit Jonah out on dry land. This time Jonah will arise and go to Nineveh.

In chapter 3, Jonah only gets one day into Nineveh (a city that took three days to walk through) before he stops and proclaims a message that we have reason to believe wasn't the one God gave him. All Jonah shouts is: "forty more days and Nineveh will be 'hapak' [literally overthrown or turned over]." In other words, "Prepare to die, you sorry suckers!" To Jonah's surprise, the mercy of God went before him, and his one-sentence sermon sparked a revival. The Ninevites repent, and word quickly reaches the king, who also repents. With not much to go on, the pagan king commands everyone in the city, including all the animals, to adopt a humble posture of repentance—to turn from their evil and violence. Maybe, just maybe, the king of Nineveh said, God will spare them all. Clearly, these unbelievers knew they were guilty, even without Jonah telling them.

Then God changed his mind and didn't do as he intended, or as Jonah wanted. In an ironic and humorous way, Jonah's prophecy that Nineveh would be "hapak" (which can

also mean changed or transformed in Hebrew) had come true. The people of Nineveh did indeed change. Their city was most certainly "turned over" by the work of the Spirit of God.

Jonah was livid! We learn that this is why he didn't want to go to Nineveh in the first place. He knew that God might forgive his enemies. Jonah knew that God's justice, mercy, and compassion was unlike his own. He didn't like it. He wanted God, like many of us today, to think and feel the way he does about justice.

Of course, the reader might be left wondering, "I get that God is merciful and compassionate, but where is the justice in this story? And how do I apply this to my life?"

In his commentary on Jonah, Phillip Carey writes:

We must be clear where Jonah gets it wrong. It's not as if we should never desire justice or even celebrate the wrath of God. . . . It is good news when the oppressor is toppled, the terrorist is caught, and the torturer enjoys no impunity. The arrival of justice is heartening for the afflicted. . . . [T]he great danger is that instead of rejoicing at the vindication of the afflicted, we self-righteously identify ourselves as the afflicted and the victimized, taking pity on ourselves and not on others, so that in our imagination the LORD becomes a weapon in our campaign to destroy our enemies, an instrument for our own vengefulness rather than the judge of the whole earth" (Phillip Carey, *Brazos Theological Commentary*, 134).

Carey goes on, "[God's] aim is always to overturn the evil that destroys his creation, and he can accomplish this justly by destroying the evildoer, but yet more justly and gloriously by turning the evil heart into something new." So, God "changes his mind" as Jonah 3:10 says, to "overcome evil with good," echoing Paul in Rom. 12:21, and as Carey says, "defeating evil in the abundance of his mercy—doing more, not less justice" (134).

Is this not the power and justice of God as seen through the cross of Christ? It's only in the cross that we see both the justice and grace of God perfectly. Tim Keller once said, "the world says I can be just or I can be loving, but I can't be or do both." But the Lord, in his wisdom displayed on Calvary, says otherwise. Of course, if we're going to live according to God's justice, as Micah says, "we must love mercy and walk humbly with God" as we patiently trust him in our suffering and wait for God to set the world to rights in his own good time (Exodus 34:6-7).

Finally, let's not miss the main point of the book of Jonah: to expose as shameful something that we all do but don't want to admit that we do, both with God and with others. To put the question to us: "Will we be like God in our mercy, grace, and compassion, or not? Will we live according to his justice, or not?" The God who looks like Jesus invites us to follow him.

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What Does It Mean to Be a Micah 6:8 Church?

By Jonah Langenderfer

CAN YOU IMAGINE being the church who receives this message of indictment from a fiery prophet: "When we think of the terrible outrages that have been perpetuated upon the colored race by the white man, it staggers our imagination to even think of the great and sweeping condemnation that a God of justice will have to pass upon the white race on the great day of final reckoning." I want to suggest that how the Brethren

in Christ Church might have felt hearing these fiery words from editor V. L. Stump in a 1938 article in the *Evangelical Visitor* wouldn't be that different from how the people of God felt right before hearing the famous words in Micah 6:8 from the prophet Micah. Let's reflect together as the Brethren in Christ Church to address two questions. **First, what does Micah 6:8 mean in context?**

Micah 6:8 is a beautiful verse that is quoted often, but it's even more profound when read in context. It comes to us from an intense passage. Imagine your church has been called to the courtroom with God. Micah, the court prosecutor delivers God's charge to your church: "My people have not done right by me!" (6:1-2), and God laments, "Have I not done right by you?" (vv. 3-5). You respond: "What sacrifice can we offer to do

right by you?” (vv. 6-7). Israel’s answer misses the point and is a “superficial answer seeking to avoid true conversion,” like a husband saying sorry to his wife after an affair with a “sacrifice” of flowers and chocolate, but refusing to take any steps to stop the affair and truly reconcile.

Micah responds for God: “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 tells the people what they should have said, the answer they’ve already heard multiple times from God through other prophets. What should they have humbly said to their gracious God? “Thank you for loving us and saving us! We are yours and will walk with you alone as our God! We will gratefully love you and one another all our days!” The superficial sacrifice of religion (flowers and chocolate) isn’t the fruit of a true faith that heals a wounded relationship with God. God is saying, “Instead of a people of idolatry and injustice, be my people who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before their God!”

Second, what does it look like to be a Micah 6:8 church?

It is important to see that Micah’s call is not primarily given to the individual Christian to go do his or her part to change the world by acting justly and loving mercy. When atheists doubt God’s existence and ask Christians, “Where is all the mercy, justice, humble godliness in the world?” God says to

us: your mission is to be my people! Put another way, “For the change you want to see in this world, you be the change!” Through the grace of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, be God’s transformed people of justice, mercy and humility before God! Our first task is to be the church, not to make the unjust world the church.

So what does loving mercy look like? The early church in Acts were people of radical mercy. If one of the believers had need, that person was treated like family. When my wife had hip surgery this year and if I hadn’t had insurance, I would have sold property or done whatever it took to cover the surgery. The early church was such a *koinonia* community (Acts 2:42) of radical family love and mercy for one another that they shared their resources and even sold land so that poverty was eliminated among them.

When the world sees this countercultural community of mercy and even experiences its overflow, the world is both attracted and scandalized. The Roman emperor Julian was an enemy of Christianity, but he admitted that believers’ generosity to the poor made it highly attractive: “Why do we not observe that it is [Christians’] benevolence to strangers . . . and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase [Christianity]. . . For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”

What does acting justly look like? The early church not only mercifully shared their resources with the needy among them through ministries like a food pantry or benevolence offering. They also acted justly when marginalized widows from a minority culture among them were being unjustly denied or “overlooked.” Mercy to these minority widows would have been insufficient. Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.” The early church did an organized effort of justice by delegating seven leaders from the minority group being overlooked (Acts 6:5) and authorizing them to be responsible to correct the injustice (Acts 6:3) that was threatening the unity of the church. Once they did this, the witness of the united church being a people of justice contributed to the spread of the word of God (Acts 6:7).

When a prophet among us today brings God’s indictment before the church, what would it look like to be a church that humbly listens and seeks to repent and again “walk humbly before God”? May God help us be a Micah 6:8 church.

Jonah Langenderfer is pastor of the Pleasant Hill (OH) Brethren in Christ Church. This article is adapted from a sermon he preached at Pleasant Hill.

Justice, Mercy, and Foster Care

by Drew Strayer

LOVE MERCY, ACT justly, and walk humbly with your God. Those are the things we are expected to do if we are people of God. Rejected are the offerings for sin, guilt, friendship, and tithe. Instead, the list includes ways of being that benefit individuals and those around them. Mercy, justice, humility—gifts for our own wellbeing and to others as worship to God.

As people who understand Scripture through the lens of Jesus Christ, what are his calls to his followers in the New Testament? Among others, we find blessings for the poor

in spirit, mourners, meek, hunger for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, righteous martyrs, salt and light of the earth, and many others. In Christ’s commands and blessings, we hear echoes of Micah’s prophetic call for mercy, justice, and humility.

As one who misses the goal but strives toward it, I offer this brief reflection. My wife, Millyellen, and I and our biological daughter (and son when home from college) have been serving as a foster family for the past year. Last summer, we cared for a newborn in

the hospital and then in our home before she transitioned to a safe extended family member. In the last week, we concluded eight months of care for a sibling group who transitioned to extended family. From this limited but rich experience I offer some thoughts.

First, mercy, justice, and humility are calls from God to Christ followers but are not expected of the world. Human capitalist systems are not designed to reward those characteristics—quite the opposite. We are to be in the world as servants of God’s King-

dom, not of the world or its kingdoms. Second, God calls us to love sacrificially and remember that God “puts the lonely in families”(Ps .68:6) when we feel we have nothing left. Finally, we may not see the reward for faithfulness or the fruit of our care in this lifetime.

God does not give us more than we can handle when we walk in God’s strength and grace and love. God absolutely gives us more than we can handle on our own. When we come to the ends of ourselves, we see God’s perfecting power and strength made manifest in our weakness. What a precious gift when we have nothing left and feel like we’re about to crumble and God provides what we lack and the Kingdom of God impacts the moment!

If mercy, justice, and humility were characteristics the world valued, human systems would make it easier and of worldly reward to faithfully follow God’s calls. Foster care can be joyful sacrifice as children are loved and wrapped in grace and thrive while they grow. But the foster care system can be slow to act in defense of the vulnerable, rich in grace for those who’ve demonstrated themselves poor stewards of trust, and demanding and harsh to those extending themselves in care and sacrifice to vulnerable children.

We’ve seen in recent years a refocus from “What is best for the kids?” to “How can we reunite birth families?” The working assumption is that birth families are better, and

so birth parents’ rights are protected by the courts. is Unless birth parents have completely refused every single element of the reunification process, the goal is to return children to their care, regardless of accountability to healthy child-rearing.

If we expected the world to function according to God’s call to justice and mercy, we would jump and shout and scream, “dangerous,” “illogical,” “unrighteous” or more. Trust me, if shouting (or jumping for that matter) made any difference, I would have no voice left and my legs would have collapsed. The reality is that the state and courts are run by humans, and there are absolutely principalities and powers in this world that seek to structure systems that do not lead to human flourishing, but rather the promulgation of pain and grief.

As a follower of Christ I must ask, what can I do to walk in Christ’s ways and “proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and set the oppressed free, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18-19)?” I believe I need to be willing to speak truth to power even when I have no words left, to keep loving when it hurts, to keep giving when I’m ready to give up, and to keep serving when I’m out of strength. In those places of my emptiness, Christ can shine.

In those moments when we’ve loved, cared, and helped these precious ones heal, and then the system demands they visit the

ones who harmed them and traumatized them, we cannot refuse the civil authority, but we can speak truth to power so that the system is notified of the harmful impacts. We can and must be ready when they get back from that visit to love, care, and help them heal again. The feelings of powerlessness and the desire for justice and retributive judgment can be infinitely strong at times when night terrors awaken these little ones God calls us to care for. But we are called to love enemies. King David called down God’s justice on the wicked and God knows I’ve done the same, but I’ve also called down God’s mercy and I know God the omnipotent can redeem anyone and heal any pain.

Every day, broken and human Christ-led foster parents and families wade into water over their heads to hold up little ones and care for and love them. They know justice is a fruit they will never see yet hope that healing and wholeness at some level will be fruit they *can* see, always trusting that God will hold them up as they seek to love mercy, act justly, and walk humbly with God.

Drew and Millyellen Strayer are planting a neighborhood expression of Christ’s love in Salem, OR. They have raised two biological children and fostered three children. They eagerly seek to love others well, and while they seek justice for the vulnerable, they readily acknowledge their reliance on God’s grace and the forgiveness of others for their own failures to love well.

Mercy as the Means of Justice

By Zach Spidel

MOST PEOPLE I know tend to assume, most of the time, that mercy and justice stand in some sort of tension with one another. Perhaps it is the tension that holds taut between two opposites pulling in different directions, or perhaps it is a creative tension between two noble goods that are, nevertheless, not entirely compatible with one another. In any event, it has been my experience that mercy is usually thought of as abrogating or, at least, lessening the demands of justice.

Justice demands—in this account—that

each one gets what they deserve, be it reward or punishment. Mercy, however, withholds from meting out punishments justly deserved. Mercy declares an amnesty and forgoes the punishment or penalty which justice would demand. This is a typical account of the two virtues in question. In the contemporary West, we default to it without thinking much about it. But I am convinced that this account of their relationship misses the most profound insights of Scripture on what each entails and how they relate.

For this brief article, I wish to take you to



a single passage from the prophet Isaiah that lays bare a different relationship between the two and, thereby, bears witness to a different conception of each. Read Isaiah 30. The chapter opens with a classic cataloguing of prophetic woes: “Woe to the rebellious children, says the LORD, who carry out a plan, but not mine. . .” (v. 1). God catalogues the

rebellion of his children in excruciating detail and with wild, terrible imagery. They've been told to seek security in him alone, but instead they make forbidden alliances with the earthly empire of Egypt, thinking that one unjust power can save them from another (the Assyrians threatening destruction).

Even worse, the people implore the prophets "not to see" and beg for lies to live by—they even ask for the prophets to speak no more of the Holy One of Israel! (v. 10-11). They reject God's word and trust in oppression and deceit, and because they give themselves over to those forces, God tells them this sin will "become for you like a break in a high wall, bulging out and about to collapse, whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant. . ." (v. 13). Even with the weight of their sin bulging like a break in the wall, even at this late hour, however, God calls to them. He shows them a way out and tells them, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (v. 15). But the people flatly reject God's warning: "But you refused and said, 'No! We will flee upon horses'—therefore you shall flee!—and, 'We will ride upon swift steeds'—therefore your pursuers shall be swift! A thousand shall flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you shall flee until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill" (v. 16-17).

God tried to show them a way out; they have had every opportunity to repent. Instead, they openly and repeatedly and know-

ingly chose evil over good, oppression and deceit over the God of justice. Keep that in mind as you read the very next, astonishing, verse of this chapter:

Therefore, the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him (v. 18).

The conjunctive words here hold wonders. The first two "therefores" refer to the people's persistent, knowing, unrepentant choosing of evil. In view of that, because of that, God waits. He waits until they will take grace from him. The people will reap the whirlwind of their own sowing until, at last, God gets to do what he wants to do and give them grace and mercy. Those therefores are wonderful! But even more amazing is the "for" that begins the second sentence of this verse. Why does God respond to human injustice with patient waiting, with a determination to wait out the evil intentions of rebellious children until they will let him show them mercy? He patiently endures their evil and waits to show them mercy BECAUSE "the LORD is a God of justice."

He waits to show mercy not in abrogation of his justice or even as something in tension with it. His mercy arises from and is a means toward satisfying his justice. But how can that be if mercy relents on demanding what justice insists on? I suggest that this passage shows us that such a conception of these two virtues falls short of their biblical depiction.

I briefly suggest an alternative approach that better accords with this Scripture's profound insights. Justice might be thought of as that which establishes or re-establishes God's shalom—his peace. God's peace is not the mere absence of conflict, but the healthy inhabitation of that web of relationships for which God has designed us. Shalom is when all things and all people stand in right, life-affirming relationship with their Creator and with one another. Justice aims at establishing or reestablishing shalom. As it turns out, what most often can re-establish shalom in cases where evil is done is not vengeance or punishment, but forgiveness, reconciliation, and, yes, mercy.

So, because God is just, he waits to be merciful, knowing that it is mercy that will heal our wayward hearts and bring us to the point of repentance and a willingness to make restitution. It was, after all, the merciful reception by Jesus that caused a callous tax collector to abandon his lies and return his ill-gotten gains four times over. It was the mercy of Jesus that brought Paul to his knees and turned him around to serve the church he had formerly persecuted. The biblical examples could be multiplied for some time. You may fill in many examples yourself and, in fact, I commend that exercise to you as being good for the soul!

Zach Spidel is pastor of East Dayton Fellowship, Dayton, OH.

Practicing Justice and Mercy for Forty Years

By Marian Musser

IN SOUTH CENTRAL Pennsylvania, there is a Christian social services agency whose mission is to show the love and hope of Christ by serving neighbors in need. Founded by three Brethren in Christ congregations in 1982, New Hope Ministries (New Hope) is now supported by 280 congregations.

Scriptures like Micah 6.8 and others addressing peace, justice, and acts of mercy were motivational to the task force that worked to found the ministry, along with Jesus's parable

in Matthew 25 about the sheep and the goats. Jesus's brother James also stresses the importance of putting faith into action in responding to the physical needs of those without clothes and daily food (James 2:14-17), and the apostle John instructs those who claim to have the love of God to help those in need (1 John 3:16-18).

At a time of rising unemployment in northern York County in 1982, especially with layoffs at Caterpillar and Harley Davidson, families who had never sought assistance

found themselves facing financial crisis. At that same time the federal government announced major cuts to domestic programs which meant the only social services center in the area would be closed. The question facing the task force was whether and how to respond that would make a difference. Though none on the task force had experience in social services, they engaged in some leg work to discern the scope of the problem and began to envision a faith-based center supported by local churches, businesses, and

individuals that would offer comprehensive services where Jesus's love would be demonstrated.

Could something like New Hope Ministries do this? From its modest beginning forty years ago at the Dillsburg Brethren in Christ Church—with a part-time director, limited funds, and numerous dedicated and committed volunteers—New Hope has grown from helping several dozen people each month to serving more than six thousand people each month from nine centers, sixteen more locations served by its Mobile Pantry, and fifteen stability and workforce programs. The stability and workforce programs range from basic money management and GED classes to nurse aid and forklift training. Putting stability and workforce programs in place, and more recently hiring a housing and homeless coordinator, grew out of an understanding that training, empowerment, and capacity building are important parts of showing love and doing justice.

From its very beginning, treating clients (“guests” in today’s parlance) with dignity, respect, and compassion has been a hallmark of New Hope. The following account from a 1984 newsletter is an example of compassion in action by one of New Hope’s directors:

Sharon and her son came to New Hope for bread one cold and icy day. I was busy and not paying much attention to her, but as they were about to leave I heard her say to her son who had on a lightweight, too-small jacket, “Pull your jacket up around your neck, we have a long walk.” I asked, “Where are you walking to on a day like this?” She explained that she had a toothache and was going to the Health Center. There were clients waiting to see me, and the phone was ringing off the hook, but I said to her, “Just wait, I’ll take you over there, and call when you’re finished and I’ll take you home.” An hour later, Sharon called. I was with a client and the volunteer told her that I’d be there shortly. Fifteen minutes later Sharon called again, wondering where I was. The volunteer assured her I was coming but that I was still busy with a client. Finally I told the next client in the office to wait for me, that I’d be right back.

When Sharon got into the car she was very quiet. Then she said, “What were you doing when I called the first time?” I became annoyed at the question because of how busy and rushed my day had been, and with all the love I could muster, I told her I was counseling with a client. Then she asked, “And what were you doing the second time I called?” I explained I was counseling the same client. Then she said, “And what are you going to do when you get back to the office?” I said, “I’m going to see the client I asked to wait while I came to get you.” “Wow,” she said. I turned and looked at her, “What do you mean, Wow?” She said, “You make me feel so important that you would stop everything you were doing just to come and pick me up.”

I stopped, caught my breath, and realized that my simple act had had a profound impact on Sharon. I shared with her that God loves her and that she is important to Him. I exclaimed, “Don’t ever forget that you are important, and that it’s a very little thing for me to take you to the dentist and home again.” In stillness I thanked God for this opportunity to show and speak of God’s love.

Here one sees the desire at New Hope to share the message of Christ’s love with guests and invite those who are interested to open their hearts to Jesus. There are Bibles in several languages, current copies of *Our Daily Bread*, and other relevant brochures prominently displayed and available in the reception area of every New Hope center. There are frequent reminders of God’s love throughout each center and a welcoming atmosphere of care for guests, volunteers, and staff.

Another example of staff exemplifying a humble servant attitude is this story by one of New Hope’s case workers. Beth called New Hope sobbing because she had just received a call from the school nurse asking her to pick up two of her children because they had head lice nits in their hair. Beth explained that she had already treated the entire family and invested so much money on special shampoo, dry cleaning, and furniture spray disinfectant—all of it a financial burden on their limited income. Beth had daily emotional ups and downs and now felt to-

tally overwhelmed. She couldn’t pick up the children because her car was inoperable, needing \$900 worth of repairs. Beth was so desperate she began talking about taking her children to foster care. Not how she expected to spend her day, the case worker purchased shampoo and comb, picked up the children, helped Beth comb the children’s hair and clean the house. More than that, the case worker had asked another client who lived alone to go along to help. The other client was excited for this opportunity. Beth made it through this crisis and was grateful that someone had cared enough and was willing to help. The case worker said the help given that day was not hard. It only required a willingness to go and making oneself available.

In 1988 two migrant families were living in a tent at a local campground. When they came to New Hope, one of the women was pregnant. They were without work, money, and most of all they were without hope. Later one of the families wrote a letter thanking New Hope for all that was done to help them and give them hope again.

I want to thank you for everything New Hope has done for us. You got us in a home, heat for us, food, gas; you name it, you have done it and we are very grateful for that. We have a beautiful baby boy. Thanks to New Hope, I have hope again in people. I know there are people out there who care about people.

The New Hope of 2023 is the legacy of those who sought to be obedient to Scripture and Jesus’s teachings about caring for those in need. Though none of the founders of New Hope had training or experience in social services and sometimes wondered what in the world they were doing and how they would manage it all, they acted in obedience and trusted that God would guide and provide.

Marian Musser was a member of the original task force that founded New Hope Ministries and served several stints on the board for a total of twenty-seven years, including seven years as chair and six as secretary. She and her husband attend The Meetinghouse Carlisle, PA. A comprehensive history of New Hope Ministries is available in the April 2023 edition of Brethren in Christ History and Life.

Straightening Our Compass Needles

By Timothy Lyne

IF YOU LISTEN, you can certainly hear the cynicism in Pilate's voice. But given his history as a Roman career politician and governor of Judea, I think you can also hear a weariness; weariness with the hypocrisy, lies, spies, favoritism, fear. I think Pilate's "What is truth?" response to Jesus clearly defines the context of the time. Not to play with scripture here or diminish the importance of that moment, but I strongly suspect Pilate may have had the same reaction to "Peace," "Love" or "Mercy" had any of those come up instead.

If you're tempted to believe, in this present age, that the needle on our collective moral compass is bent either to the right or left, it may be helpful to keep in mind that every "present age" (beginning long before Pilate) has dealt with bent needles; Crusades, World wars, holocaust, racism, inequity in every form. It's tempting to retreat like Elijah, or reinforce our needle-leaning by listening to only those voices that reinforce our particular "bent." It's interesting to note that it was in the quiet that Elijah could hear God's still, gentle voice. I don't know if you or I could hear God's voice very clearly over the cacophony of angry, talking heads that seem to be present on every social platform today. Elijah was also reminded that there were many who hadn't succumbed to the evil of the age. It is immensely comforting to me to know that while the difficulties of this present age may/always get front page coverage, there are many, many faithful folks who diligently labor in the quiet, whose desire is to simply serve God. Maybe that's you.

So, how do you and I do that? How do we help straighten the needle? By turning Pilate's cynicism on its head. If our attitude is that of Pilate, we're essentially standing in the bottom of a hole looking down, where the view never changes and things remain the same. But if we can take a big spiritual deep breath, reflect the hope that is within us as Christians while still acknowledging that things aren't as they should be, degree by degree we take the kink out of the compass needle.

The good news is that Jesus gave us a very simple formula for bringing lofty principles down from their perch and into everyday life. "Do to others as you would like them to do to you." (Luke 6:31, Living Bible). Want to see more justice in the world? Be more just with family, friends and strangers. Want to see more peace in your life? Work at being at peace with your family, friends and strangers. Want to see more love? Love others better. Do you need mercy? Show mercy to others.

As a staff member at Paxton Ministries, I was very fortunate to see those lofty principles of justice, love, peace, and mercy at work in the lives of the residents and staff every day that I served there. When you consider that Paxton Street Home housed, fed and provided all types of care for eighty-five adult men and women who are mentally, intellectually, and/or poverty challenged, this was no small feat; there was potential for cynical thinking every day, to stare at the bottom of the hole, and we worked (and prayed) to avoid that.

As you may imagine, the back stories of some of the residents were often tragic, traumatic. Abuse of all kinds was encountered—physical, mental, financial. Some had been homeless, others had lived in unsafe and dangerous circumstances. Many important life decisions were made for them by family members, health care providers, or social service agencies—mostly well intentioned, some not. We grieved that injustice. It took constant/consistent love and patience to encourage these folks to look up. And because we live in a fallen world, not all of them did. We grieved that as well.

But there were also residents who had histories of loving families and encouraging friends who stayed in touch and would visit. We, all of us, welcomed days full of lightness and laughter. Maybe your home is like that. You are blessed and fortunate if it is.

And as is often the case, the ones ministering on many occasions became the ones ministered to. My wife Cathy and I have wonderful memories of moments where God clearly used a cheerful word from a res-

ident to raise our heads, lift our spirits. Paxton Street Home was a place where the air we breathed seemed infused with "Do unto others," a place where, degree by degree, bent needles were made straight.

Martha, a woman in her sixties, had recently come to Paxton through the county Social Services Agency. Shortly after she arrived she asked me to take her shopping at the dollar store on the trip out that evening. She grabbed a cart and we walked together down the aisles with Martha picking things up, looking them over and either putting them in the cart or back on the shelves. When we got to the register, she had a number of items in the cart and it took the cheerful young lady behind the counter a minute to ring everything up. "That will be \$18.00." Martha stood there. I stood there. I said, "Martha, it's \$18.00. Martha handed me her purse that contained \$0.37. Not enough for even one item in the cart. I didn't know it then, but Martha couldn't read or write. She couldn't tell you what time it was or tell you the difference between a one dollar bill or a hundred. And here we were with a growing line of impatient folks behind us.

In a still, quiet and gentle whisper, the young lady behind the register smiled, leaned over to Martha, put her hand on hers and said, "It's okay Martha, just leave the cart here and I'll put the things back." You could almost hear a compass needle straighten out. Truth, love, peace and mercy. It's too bad Pilate wasn't there.

Timothy Lyne is retired from serving as operations manager at Paxton Ministries, Harrisburg, PA. He works part-time as the facilities manager at the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church where he also often plays bass for the worship team.

Doing Justice Through Open Conversations

By Nick Ressler

I LOVE OUR denomination and have an affinity for our history. I grew up on the stories of our missionaries, small Sunday school classes starting Bible camps, and whole families picking up their lives to plant new churches. I have watched many generations of my family try to live out the values of this denomination. I myself fell in love with the diversity in the style of worship and teaching from location to location, but with a commonly-held understanding of the centrality of Christ. As I grew, I began to appreciate and understand Jesus's distinct, unwavering, and countercultural invitation for his followers to engage in the work of peace and justice, and I have treasured our denominational work at heeding this call. I also believe that we should join together to seek to improve where we may have failed.

Like many other denominations, Brethren in Christ value dialogue and conversation, but it seems to me that in recent years this value has been severely tested. When a topic is controversial, the rules of engagement are not clear, there is little or no denominational guidance for dialogue, and injustices are done to both congregational leaders and members, not to mention the denomination as a whole. This leads to increasingly individualistic identity formation that doesn't always conform to Brethren in Christ theology and values. In some cases, pastors' credentials have been revoked, causing much pain and trauma. Could that pain be avoided with more regular corporate engagement with some of these issues? What might it mean to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God as we find ways to engage in dialogue, to have meaningful conversation? Here are three examples of current issues that I believe need open dialogue. Perhaps you can think of others.

First, we have a definitive theological belief about human sexuality that has not changed in many decades, but we haven't talked about it much. Some would say defensively, "That is simply untrue! We have a position paper that has recently been rewritten. We had an impact seminar. Some leaders at-

tended a Preston Sprinkle conference. What more could you want?"

I'll give credit where credit is due, but those steps have been few and far between, and I believe they have lacked the necessary depth to prepare pastors and leaders to engage parishioners in in-depth conversations. They have given answers to predetermined questions that amount to apologetics at the most basic and cursory theological levels. Many of the sessions and speakers have simply helped participants conclude that the topic is "complicated." We need more, and I believe it is the denomination's responsibility to provide credentialed leaders with the resources they need. If the denomination doesn't do this, then the local leader has to be the denominational proxy with families that are working through this issue. And what if there is disagreement?

A second issue is women in ministry. Ahead of the affirmation of women in ministry in 1982, we published papers on the theological reasons for the decision. We asked credentialed women to speak at General Conference, appointed women as pastors, to the General Church Board, as bishops, missionaries, and more. We made it a point to reaffirm our theological position at General Conference in 1992 and again in 2017, and we enjoy declaring that our denomination is egalitarian. At the same time, we have credentialed pastors who do not agree with an egalitarian theological position and who have deliberately stood in the way of women in ministry. Others are unclear where they stand and yet their credentialing is renewed. We are a divided denomination on an issue that is more than forty years old and supposedly decided definitively.

In 2022 at General Assembly, we barely passed a resolution to change the *Articles of and Faith and Doctrine* to tighten up this language and make it completely clear that we are egalitarian. We need to vote and pass it a second time in 2024 for it to be final. We pride ourselves on being a "family," yet we have done nothing to close the division. Why aren't we talking about this disagreement?

Why aren't we having more discussion and education to close the gap? Is this fair and just to all the women who have been credentialed during the last forty years? Is it fair and just to the many voices who spoke against the motion at our 2022 gathering? Are we speaking with integrity when we declare that our denomination is one that "fully affirms women in ministry leadership at all levels of Church Life" (Women in Ministry Leadership Statement, Brethren in Christ U.S., August 28, 2017)?

A third issue is the status of Evangelicalism in the denomination. We began as a blend of Anabaptism and Pietism, and added Wesleyanism in the late nineteenth century. In the middle of the twentieth century, we associated ourselves with Evangelicalism to bring us out of our sectarian stance and help us more effectively reach more people. However, Evangelicalism has never officially been added as a fourth stream, and we seem intent on ignoring the warning from one of the denomination's most beloved theologians regarding the cost of doing so. See "Three Streams in Our Heritage: Separate or Parts of a Whole?" by Luke L. Keefer Jr., *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, April 1996.

Evangelicalism in North America has come to mean and describe so many things that to use the word is to conflate it, deliberately or not, with a sociocultural identity and movement that is far from our Brethren in Christ identity. Frankly, I believe we should be insulted when anyone suggests that it is a current and fourth stream of influence. Do we train, engage, or discuss with our pastors and leaders how to nuance the difference between the cultural evangelical and the theological evangelical? Do we ever explain why in some core courses we call Evangelicalism the fourth stream, but in none of our official documentation is it referred to as such? Do we talk about Keefer's warnings about the toll Evangelicalism will eventually take on our identity as Brethren in Christ?

In her article, "A Giant Bag of Core Values': Findings from the 2021 Brethren in Christ Pastoral Identity Portrait Project,"

Lisa Weaver Swartz noted her finding that our identity is fragile and familial (see *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, August 2022). Figuring out our identity requires conversation with the family about who we are and who we are not. We must know the “why” behind what we choose and what we reject. It isn’t about preserving “the good old days” or holding onto things that need to be let go. It isn’t about gatekeeping and only allowing for “cradle-BICs.” It’s about identifying, declaring, and knowing who we are so that we are confident about what fits our family and what doesn’t. It is not fair for us

to be unclear and not provide avenues for discussion and discernment.

Unfortunately, we have left the local pastor to educate his or her congregations on all these issues (and probably others), with little accountability beyond a standard six-year self-check-in. Is it possible that our focus on who we want to be when we turn 250 years old comes at the expense of who we actually are at 245? Even when the pastor or the church does not part ways from the denomination, this lack of processing sows seeds of discord and separateness. The longer we allow pastors and leaders to prepare them-

selves regarding complicated and divisive topics without any input from the denomination or opportunities for open dialogue, the more we are contributing to the lack of a common identity in core theological issues and making it more difficult to talk about the next divisive topic that will surely come.

Nick Ressler is pastor of the Conoy Brethren in Christ Church, Elizabethtown, PA.

God’s Call for Mishpat, Hesed, and Shalom

By Henry B. Johnson

AS A TEENAGER, I remember sitting in the front seat in the car of a dear old saint from church who ran through a stop sign. We got pulled over. She was overwhelmed, maybe a tad bit embarrassed, and just flustered. I fought with all my might to keep my juvenile snickering to a minimum. But then something remarkable happened. Of course, the cop knew Mrs. Loane—everybody knew and was taught by “Aunt Bette Ann” at some point in childhood. He even offered her a simple warning and a chance to be on her way. She would have none of that. I sat there even more amazed as she seemingly begged him to do his job and write that ticket.

Now for most of us, we may have just received that blessing, taken our warning, and been on our way. We would most definitely continue in the freedom that was afforded us that day. We would also, though, be free to either obey the laws of the road or keep running the stop signs. In the book of Micah, the people of God had for generations walked in their freedom by breaking all the rules. They were unfaithful to God. Their leaders in the faith and in government were corrupt. They consistently violated God’s law, oppressed the poor and powerless, favored the rich and powerful, and ignored God.

Towards the end of the book, we reach chapter six, where God is the aggrieved Judge who brings the people to court. The everlasting mountains and hills are witnesses as the formal charges are made by God. They listen

as God cites a record of faithful love to Israel: a love that redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, and gifted them Moses, Miriam and Aaron to lead, guide, and teach them; a love that saved them from enemies, protected their journey to promise, and revealed God’s power on their behalf; and a love also denied by the empty promises and praise provided by the people.

It is here that God offers for the people then (and us today), the book of Micah’s most famous words:

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).

God concludes the court case by inviting the people to do what is good: practice (mishpat) justice because God is just; love mercy (hesed) because God is merciful, and to walk humbly or wisely (shalom) with God because God humbly walks with us. The implication here is simple: if you really love God, you will serve God, live like God lives, love like God loves. Walter Kaiser in his book *Hard Sayings of the Bible* says that the main point of Micah 6:8 can be said to be that considering how Yahweh (God) has saved us, “the natural consequence of truly forgiven men and women [is] to demonstrate the reality of their faith by living it out in the marketplace.” Kaiser continues, “such living would be accompanied with acts and

deeds of mercy, justice, and giving oneself for the orphan, the widow, and the poor.”

Israel knew God is just because of the law. In Deuteronomy 24:17-22, God commanded his people not to mistreat foreigners, the fatherless, or widows, and instituted a social reform designed for those who are well off to provide for the oppressed. Micah joins a long line of prophets (Ezekiel, Hosea, Malachi, etc.) in critiquing Israel and even her priests for not properly shepherding the flock. When the people fail to do God’s justice (mishpat), they fail to act like God, and they fail in helping their neighbors.

Israel knew that God loves mercy (hesed). They saw God’s mercy because he is the God who created everything but chose to bless them (Abram and his descendants). They saw God’s mercy in their rescue from slavery and suffering in Egypt, provision of bread from heaven and water from a rock, compassionate forgiveness when Israel sinned and turned to other leaders or idols. God did not abandon them in the wilderness, but led them by day and night, and sustained them for forty years in the wilderness. When the people failed to love with hesed, the way God loved them, they failed in their witness as light to the nations.

Israel knew that God walks humbly (shalom). God consistently left heaven to walk with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. God walks humbly, speaking the world into existence

but taking time to fashion humans out of clay, breathe life into us, and make us in the image of God. God walks humbly in giving us the freedom to choose whether or not to follow him. God walks humbly in creating his tabernacle from freewill offerings, making it intentionally small and with minimal furnishings (when compared to other temples in the Ancient Near East), and setting up a system to consecrate, clothe, and provide food for his priests, while being the all-powerful God of all creation but choosing to dwell inside a portable moving tent. When the people failed to walk humbly in shalom, they were not at peace with God, creation, family, neighbors, and even themselves.

The story of Israel should have confirmed to Israel that God is just, a lover of mercy, and walks humbly. The people of Israel in return should have been faithful as God was faithful. What did God require of them? To do God's justice, to love as God loved, and to walk in complete peace.

At our church in Harrisburg, we are com-

mitted to doing God's justice (mishpat) by making things right. We recognize that our world is not as it should be, and that Christ has left the Holy Spirit and the Church to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, set the oppressed free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19). The law commanded justice by calling for care and commitment to God and neighbors far and near. We obey by welcoming our neighbors, celebrating their cultures, and learning from them to see God in new ways. We serve our neighbors by feeding them, equipping them in the learning of English, prepping them to study for citizenship, and helping them transition to life in this beautiful, strange place.

We are to love mercy (hesed). Hesed is God's love in action because God is love (1 John 4:7-8). It is God's love for all people, but particularly the disadvantaged and to the weak. Hesed is God's agape love, God's unmerited favor, and God's love that is not out of obligation. Hesed is God's favor and grace,

God's faithfulness, lasting loyalty and kindness. We obey by asking forgiveness for good left undone, and praying for opportunities to forsake neutrality which only helps the oppressor. We serve through doing life together and navigating journeys of healing that bring our people from oppression to liberation in Christ.

We are to walk in peace (shalom). As followers of Christ, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1), so we live to share that good news with all others. In Christ we can have peace with the creation all around us, so we live to care for the greater good of the world. In Christ we can have peace with others, so we live in this polarized world dependent on the Holy Spirit to guide us and the Church to equip us to be peacemakers who bring light and reconciliation.

Henry (Hank) Johnson is senior pastor of the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

continued from page 12

counts, we see Jesus walking humbly with God, the very mission of his life oriented around fellowship with his Father (or as the Good News Translation puts it "liv[ing] in humble fellowship with [his] God."). He goes off to pray or retreats from the crowds to a secluded place. When he does this, the need has not dissipated, yet Jesus knows he needs the fellowship of the Father in order to find restoration in his presence, to maintain alignment with his Father's heart, and to seek discernment along the journey.

Then when he returns or is drawn back to the crowds, his sense of his Father's work is heightened. He sees the physical needs of others and responds with generosity. He sees the people's spiritual hunger and thirst and responds with compassion. He sees the oppression of "the least of these" and responds with holy indignation and solidarity with the oppressed.

Jesus practices the intimacy he has cultivated with his Father through his overflow of justice, mercy, and humility. Campolo frames this idea as "praxis" and posits, "Our intimacy with Christ is best developed in the

context of carrying out our responsibilities, as Christians, together in a community" (188). True acts of justice and mercy pave the pathway for shalom, ushering in the not-yet kingdom to the here-and-now.

According to Thomas Merton (in *Thomas Merton Spiritual Master: Essential Writings*), "He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas."

Many people throughout the course of time have done justice and loved mercy, and they may have effected social change or removed one more brick from an oppressive system, but apart from walking humbly with God on the way, their efforts are only temporary and do not ultimately meet the requirement of God for shalom.

In the end, our good works do not save us or others. But they are evidence of God's

Spirit actively at work deep within those who walk humbly with him, molding and shaping us and then calling us forth in the spaces and places in which he's planted us to reveal and usher in the justice and mercy inherent in his kingdom.

Kerry Hoke is a licensed Brethren in Christ pastor, serving over the past five and half years in a variety of leadership roles at Messiah Lifeways. She is active in the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church as a deacon and ESL instructor.

Editor's Notes:

► If you haven't renewed your subscription for 2023, please do so soon. You can renew online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom/.

► The Fall 2023 edition will explore our identity as Brethren in Christ (based on Project 250's first goal of reaffirming our identity as a community of Christ-followers.)

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Reflections on Micah 6:8

By Kerry Hoke

MY HUSBAND'S AUNT owns a cabin along Pine Creek in Northern Pennsylvania. I'm always arrested by the stillness, such a contrast from the noisy pace of my day-to-day life and mind. In the quiet of the early morning or at the hush of dusk, the creek waters often get markedly still, and when they do, the most vivid reflection appears, a mirrored image of the trees and foliage that line the bank and crowd the mountain that swells upward.

This kind of vivid reflection is described in Micah 6:8: "He has told 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" (NIV). Justice, mercy, and humility are the very heart and character of God. As we take time to be still in his presence, to intentionally seek him in the quiet and the hush, he restores our souls, and the rushing waters within us also still, and we begin to reflect back God's heart.

We need to understand this as a three-stranded mandate: doing justice, loving mercy (or kindness), and walking humbly with God. One is not meant to be divorced from the others.

Think back to basic chemistry class and mixtures vs. solutions. A mixture is a combi-

nation of substances that do not completely dissolve and, therefore, can be separated out. A solution is a combination of substances that are dissolved completely and can't be filtered out. God's list of what he requires is a solution. Micah 6:8 lists the parts of the solution that bring God pleasure and best reflects his heart—doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with him—and none can be separated from the others. They are completely intertwined and interconnected because they are the very essence of the heart of God.

—Justice without mercy and humility turns us into self-righteous zealots.

—Mercy without justice and humility turns us into indulgent saviors.

—Humility without justice and mercy turns us into ineffective doormats.

The Lord's "requirement" is not meant to be a heavy yoke or a checklist of drudgeries, though too often we are prone to performing moral acrobatics that are a vaporous illusion, a spiritual sleight of hand that damage the delicate fabric of our own souls and the souls of those we serve in the name of ourselves.

In a book entitled *The God of Intimacy and Action*, co-authors Tony Campolo and Mary Darling dig into this interplay between pursuit of divine intimacy and social action.

Campolo and Darling assert, "God-ordained spirituality, in one way or another, must involve a commitment to intimacy with Christ that results in evangelism and justice work. . . . Otherwise our spirituality becomes a form of arrested spiritual development that verges on narcissism" (207).

Instead, we RSVP to Jesus's invitation to "follow me," walking with God day to day. We engage in vital practices that cultivate intimacy in stillness, silence, and solitude, and from there, we discover an urgency to rightly call out the world's broken, unjust systems, to see others through eyes of mercy and kindness, and to respond with wise humility to its brokenness with the heart of God to restore his intended shalom.

Walking with God in humility, connecting to the Vine and planting our roots by the streams of Living Water helps us reflect more and more the heart of God from the inside out so that justice, mercy, and humility pour forth simply as an overflow of the heart of God within us.

For a living example of this trifacta, we turn to our model—the one on whom the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and over whom the Father spoke, "This is my Son whom I love. In him I am well pleased."

Over and over throughout the gospel ac-