

“LINK: FOR MAKING LIFE COUNT”
Micah 6:6-8

Lessons By The Lake Summer Series
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This morning we're going to talk about success. We're going to talk about what our view of success is and then get a view of what God's view of success is. It is true that most of us here this morning are at least somewhat driven to succeed in something.

There is something in all of us that makes us want to do things better than average or makes us want to win. There is something in us that would love to have some recognition, some reward or some good grades so we can know that we did something well.

Or perhaps you are one who places a lot of expectations on your kids being successful. Perhaps you were never able to reach certain goals when you were young so you want them to fulfill your dreams. You want your kid to be the next Olympic star or HS/college/pro athlete.

If we weren't able to get our own recognition, our own popularity, our own dates then perhaps we can push our kids to fulfill our goals. And then when they get that award or win that beauty pageant then they can stand up and thank you for being their inspiration. There are definitely parents today who try to relive their lives through their kids.

So how would you define success in your life? Is it your job? The title you have achieved or how many people report to you? Is it your family or your marriage? Is success for you the business you lead, the home or toys you own, the size of your farm, or your retirement nest egg?

What does it mean to you to be successful? Now as we deal with this question one thing we need to remember is that our God is not just a God of Sunday morning. He is not a God for just putting in some time here each week or of putting a few dollars in the offering plate.

You see God is a God who doesn't want to be God of just a portion of your life. God doesn't want to be a God of just a portion of your paycheck. God wants to be God of your complete and total life; he wants to be part of everything that you do.

And because of that God is very concerned about how we live each and every day, and each and every moment. Whether it's at work, at home, doing some sporting activity, or out shopping God wants us to live a life each day that pleases him.

In the Old Testament the prophet Micah is addressing the question the Israelites are asking of how they can please God. The Israelites, who throughout their history had so often fallen short of God's standards, are wondering what they could do to win God back to their side.

They ask, *“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”* They are wondering how they can be successful in God's eyes.

Well Micah has a response for the Israelites and he has a response for us. He says that this is what the Lord requires: *“to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* This, according to Micah, is how to live a life that counts.

Now for those who may have been raised Lutheran you may start to flinch at this point of what the Lord “requires.” You may say, wait a minute, it sounds like we must do something. Ever since I was little I was told that God’s gift of salvation is free—there’s nothing we need/can do.

Well of course that is true. Salvation is a gift of God’s grace. But the question is what our response is to that gift? It is the greatest gift you can ever be given. So how can we sit back and do nothing? How can we turn our lives into a living thank-you to God?

Micah says the first thing we need to do to please God is to act justly to do what is right. Think about the last time you were treated unfairly or unjustly. Every one of us probably can remember instances that pop into our heads.

It might be standing in a line too long, or being charged too much for a repair, or something bigger. But then you start to harbor some bitterness, some anger, and our blood begins to boil. Each one of us can remember times when we feel we were treated unfairly.

And if you’re at all human you may start to think of some elaborate scheme of how you can get even with that person. There is a story that appeared in the LA Times about a guy named Dave Haggler. He is a former referee and umpire, and has the ultimate story of justice.

He says that he was driving too fast in the snow in Boulder, CO. A policeman pulled him over and gave him a speeding ticket. He tried to talk him out of it telling him how worried he was about his insurance going up, about the good driver he normally is and so on. The officer told him that if he didn’t like it he could go to court.

First game of the next baseball season Dave was umpiring behind home plate and the first batter up was this policeman, and they both recognized each other. The officer asked, “Say, how did that thing with the ticket go in court?” Dave tells him, “You better swing at everything.”

What God requires of us is that we get at least as worked up, and passionate, about someone else being treated unfairly as we do about ourselves. He requests that we become as aware of those victims who are overlooked and forgotten as we are aware of the injustices in our lives.

It is important that we stay informed, that we’re aware of what’s happening in the world. And when God leads us to we should speak out and take action. We should pay attention to which governments, or which companies, or which of society’s groups and systems are treating people unjustly. We should pray for the victims.

You know, my friends, we are blessed by God in so many ways. We have so much stuff, so much education and privileges. Isn’t it our obligation and responsibility to help people in need? God says, “Do justice.” He doesn’t say do it only sometimes when you think of it or if it works into your busy schedule. And don’t just talk about it. God says, “Do justice.”

The second thing Micah tells us that God requires of us to be successful is to love mercy. Notice here that it's not that we simply have mercy but that we love mercy. In other words, we shouldn't do acts of kindness out of obligation but instead out of love and care.

The Bible, of course, is filled with stories about God's love and mercy. The story of the Prodigal Son; the Woman at the Well shunned by the community and how Jesus gave her living water; the adulterous woman about to be stoned and how Jesus stood up for her.

We all should love God's mercy because without it we all are lost—we all fall short of God's standards. We all rely and are dependent upon God's amazing grace. And for us to celebrate God's grace we need to find ways to show mercy and love to others.

Third and finally Micah says that to be successful in God's eyes and to please him he requires that we walk humbly with our God. It means that we not only love and obey God but that we also be in awe of him; to never forget that he is in control and is Lord over the universe.

These past eight years on Mondays of taking care of my grandchildren, Soren and Elise, I re-learned the difficulty of walking with a young child. At times both Soren & Elise found it fun to do everything but walk in step with me.

It was especially challenging when they were around three years old and we would be at a place like the Como Zoo. They would all of a sudden run ahead, dart into a crowd of people, or squeeze into an area that only a three year old would fit. Pushing a stroller and trying to keep them in sight I often had to put them in the stroller so they had to stay with me.

Now walking with a child, in many ways, can be like God walking with us. To walk with him means we need to be moving in the same direction. You will never really walk with God until you stop, and learn, the direction God is going.

And then in walking with God you need to change your course. You see God is not going to change his will, his purpose, his direction, to go where you want to go. Instead he wants us to look and realize where he is going. It is important that you know the direction he is calling you.

As we see in our link from Micah and all through the Bible God's idea of success, and our idea of success, are often very different. Yet God's desire is that we walk with him and allow him to guide us so that his will is done on earth as it is in heaven—so his plans are realized.

When walking with God we also need to allow him to set the pace. Whether we lag behind because we are not motivated enough, or whether we charge ahead because we are too enthusiastic, each one of these can be equally problematic. So out of trust and humility we need to allow God to determine our pace.

So this morning, as you consider success from God's point of view, I want to leave you with this question: Which of these three things—to do justice, to love mercy, or to walk humbly with your God—which of these three are your growing edge? Which do you need to focus on?

May we ask God today, and everyday, to ignite us in seeking justice in this world; to make us passionate about showing love and mercy to others; and then to guide us to walk humbly and closely with him. It is by doing this that we will truly make our lives count.