

When Justice and Mercy Seem to Collide, These 3 Biblical Steps Will Help

Look around. Listen to the politicians. Read the headlines. Talk to your neighbors and coworkers. It won't take long before two themes emerge.

Justice and mercy. But rarely do these two words occur in the same sentence or even in the same conversation.

There's a lot of talk about justice. Criminal justice. Social justice. We have a keenly developed sense of what we think is right and wrong. We demand justice for ourselves and for those who need us to stand up for them.

Problem is, we can't seem to agree on what justice looks like in every situation. What does justice look like for illegal immigrants? Or for babies developing in the womb?

It all depends on our worldview and the values we espouse. But if we're honest, we have to admit that even if we hold a biblical worldview, we fall short in executing righteous judgment. Because there's only one righteous judge.

Then there's the subject of mercy. I was challenged this week from the Beatitudes to consider what it means to be merciful. "Blessed are the merciful ..."

Mercy.

I love the sound of this word when it applies to me. Who doesn't want to *receive* mercy? On the other hand, not many of us want to *extend* mercy.

Most people, myself included, prefer to hand out judgment. You've wronged me? I want you to receive the consequences of

your actions. My natural inclination is not toward mercy ...unless *I* am the recipient.

Still, there's at least one Bible verse that includes both concepts, justice and mercy, in the same sentence.

Micah 6:8b (NIV) tells us:

"What does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

We're to act justly. Not demand judgment, but act with justice. Consider the other person's circumstances and respond with justice, despite our own opinions or preferences.

We're to love mercy. Interesting, it doesn't say *extend* mercy. It says we're to *love* it. Some translations use the word "kindness" instead of "mercy." Because mercy is meaningless if it isn't demonstrated in a tangible way.

But there's a third part: "Walk humbly with your God." In many ways, this is the most important phrase in the verse—the phrase that ties it all together. If we have a right view of ourselves in relation to the God we belong to, then justice and mercy will flow out of our relationship in Christ, prompted by the Holy Spirit who indwells us. Will we be perfect in our execution? Not even close. But we'll be moving in the right direction.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Still, there's a hitch. The verse begins by saying this is God's *requirement* for us. And the fact that it's a requirement tells us it doesn't come naturally. For if acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God flowed naturally, we wouldn't have to be commanded to do it.

They're not natural. They are intentional choices.

And perhaps, before we take on the problems of the world, we

need to start closer to home. With our spouses and children. Our family and friends. The people we work with Monday through Friday and the people we worship with on Sundays.

What would life look like if we really did—intentionally—act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God?

Let's find out! {eo}

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