his home, a fellowman of his inheritance” (2:2). In Jerusalem, the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer. All this happened on a playing field that was anything but level.

These unethical practices disgusted Micah and he was not afraid to say so. Micah’s words held a mirror to the faces of those who cheated their neighbors, calling them to account for their contemptable behavior. But Micah had another prophecy to share. He predicted that a shepherd-king would arise to rule Judah. This new ruler would come from the little town of Bethlehem; he would be a rural savior, not someone who was part of the wealthy Jerusalem aristocracy. He would change these dishonest practices; he would abolish these corrupt systems. Spoiler alert: The ruler’s name is Jesus!

Then, the prophet accused the people of not being satisfied with God’s goodness to them. “Listen to what the LORD says,” Micah testifies. “I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery” (6:1, 4). *Are you not satisfied?* “I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam” (v. 4). *Are you not satisfied?* “Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,” crossing the Jordan River into the promised land (v. 5). *Are you not satisfied?* God brought the people out of slavery, gave them wise and powerful leaders, and brought them into the promised land; and yet, God’s people *can’t get no satisfaction!*No matter what they achieve or attain, they want more. Instead of enjoying the good life that God gives them, they resort to corruption and injustice to satisfy their wishes and expectations.

“The LORD has a case against his people,” says Micah; “he is lodging a charge against Israel” (v. 2). These are hard words for the people to hear, and some of them immediately felt guilty. They ask Micah what they could do to make things better. “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?” (v. 6). “No!” said the prophet, forget about burnt offerings. “Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?” (v. 7). “No!” said the prophet, God will not be pleased with rams and oil. “Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,” said the people, “the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (v. 7). Are you kidding? Human sacrifice? “No way!” said the prophet.

The people of Jerusalem want to cut a deal with God. In this way, they are not unlike us.

* “Heal me, Lord,” we might pray after receiving a cancer diagnosis. “Answer my prayer, and I will go to church every Sunday.” (Or *nearly* every Sunday, or 2 out of 4?)
* “Help me get that promotion with the big raise, and I will give more to charity.”
* “Give me the answers for the test, and I will read the Bible more.” (The Gospels, anyway; not the Old Testament – Leviticus is hard!)
* “Make my lottery numbers come up, and I will build you a new church.” (Or I will raise my pledge, or maybe raise it 1% closer to a 10% tithe?)

Such prayers are understandable, which is to say they are human prayers; but they do not bring us any closer to God because such prayers are transactional, not relational. We are expecting something for nearly nothing. These prayers send the message that we want to show our appreciation to the LORD, but we do not really want to change our lives or our bad habits. These prayers do nothing to nurture our relationship with God.

This was true for the people of Jerusalem. They were happy to make a burnt offering, but they did not want to stop taking bribes. They were willing to sacrifice thousands of rams and to give the LORD gallons of olive oil, but they did not want to change their unjust real estate practices. They were glad to give up their firstborn child, but they did not want to stop defrauding their neighbors for gain! The hunger for satisfaction is powerful. We are pleasure-seeking creatures, and we will do almost anything to preserve what makes us feel good. When Mick Jagger sings, “I try, and I try, and I try, and I try,” he is talking about the effort we put into the search for satisfaction, even at the cost of our ethics, morals, integrity, marriages, and families.

Money can’t buy happiness; regardless of how much you have, it’s never enough. Fear will always whisper, “Unless you get more you won’t be secure.” So, what is the secret of happiness? The apostle Paul gives us a clue: “For I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Phili. 4:11-13).

This, then, is the secret of happiness that Micah reveals. It has nothing to do with money or power or real estate holdings. It has everything to do with sticking close to God and living as God expects. It has everything to do with Christ who gives us strength for living in the world. It has everything to do with the Holy Spirit who gives us the wisdom to know how to live as God’s people. The prophet says, God “showed you…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” (v. 8).

Ironically, when Mick Jagger sings, “I can’t get no satisfaction,” he is, in fact, saying he can get satisfaction (grammatically, the double negative makes the statement affirmative)! But Mick is correct that satisfaction does not come from crass consumerism. Acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God are the keys to true satisfaction. As Biblical professor Daniel Simundson notes: “God is more interested in the way people live their ordinary lives than in their religious practices.” Micah is clear about this: when we behave in this way, acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, we can achieve and hold on to happiness.

**Act justly.**This is not wishful thinking about the administration of justice in the world, but a set of concrete actions that advances fairness and equality for all of God’s people. To act justly means to work on behalf of people who are weak or powerless or exploited by others. Acting justly means more than to passively “live and let live”; it means actively fighting for another’s right to live.

**Love mercy***.* The Hebrew of this commandment is a little bit tricky because the word translated “mercy” is *hesed* and cannot be translated neatly into any one English word. *Hesed* means mercy, but it also means kindness, grace, loyalty, and faithfulness. To love *hesed* is to love these qualities which are so important in our relationship with God and with the people around us.

**Walk humbly with God***.*Once again, the challenge is concrete action: “Walk humbly.” This means to travel forward with God, walking in God’s way, and staying close to God. It means to know our place, to be humble before the God who is all-powerful and who cannot be manipulated by burnt offerings or rivers of oil. When we walk humbly, we are mindful of our deeds, because we know that God is challenging us to act justly and to love mercy.

The promise of this verse is the gift of satisfaction. When we act justly, we have better relationships with the people around us. When we love mercy, we are building a better community for all. When we walk humbly, we feel in step with Almighty God. True satisfaction does not come from property or power or money or any “thing” at all. Instead, satisfaction in life comes from being right with God, and right with the people around us.

Prayer: Shine on us Lord Jesus, bless us with your peace and presence. We know that anything is possible through you, and that you can change even the hardest of hearts. We will choose to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with you all the days of our lives. For we would be your disciples, walking in your ways. Amen.

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**The Search for Satisfaction**

Sunday, January 29, 2023 [Micah 6:1-8](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Micah+6%3a1-8&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

“It’s an old man dancing like a chicken and singing,” said the girl, laughing uncontrollably as she watched a video. Her father, professor Arthur Brooks, looked up and saw that she was watching rock star Mick Jagger (who turns 80 this year) singing The Rolling Stones’ hit “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction.” The song is a much-loved favorite of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. It hit the pop charts in 1965, reaching #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart four weeks in a row and is ranked #31 on the *Rolling Stone* magazine’s “500 Greatest Songs of All Time.”

Jagger commented on the song's appeal: “It was the song that really made the Rolling Stones, changed us from just another band into a huge, monster band...It has a very catchy title. It has a very catchy guitar riff. It has a great guitar sound, which was original at that time. And it captures a spirit of the times, which is very important in those kinds of songs...Which was [alienation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_alienation).” Interesting! The harder Mick tries, the more alienated he feels. Even after all these years, Jagger still *can’t get no…satisfaction*.

Brooks says that as we move through life, “satisfaction — the joy from fulfillment of our wishes or expectations — is evanescent [fleeting]. No matter what we achieve, see, acquire, or do, it seems to slip from our grasp.…Satisfaction…is the greatest paradox of human life. We crave it, we believe we can get it, we glimpse it and maybe even experience it for a brief moment, and then it vanishes. But we never give up on our quest to get and hold on to it.” Or, as Mick Jagger puts it, “I try, and I try, and I try, and I try.”

Brooks is right. Happiness all too quickly slips from our grasp. We crave it, we find it, we feel it…and then it disappears. And we go right back to looking for it again. We are always searching for satisfaction.

“Listen to what the LORD says,” the prophet Micah told the people of Jerusalem (6:1). His book begins with prophecies of doom: because the leaders of the people “despise justice and distort all that is right,” Micah said, “Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble” (3:9, 12). The leaders sought satisfaction using any means. Jerusalem’s “leaders judge for a bribe,” says Micah, “her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money” (3:11). Micah saw that people in power tried to get ahead in business, government, and religion, and they used corrupt and unjust practices. Rich landowners exploited vulnerable people in the community. “They covet fields and seize them,” said Micah. “They defraud a man of