

What is Real
Micah 6:6-8
10-11-2026

What is real?

It can be amazing sometimes what people will try to pass off as real, sometimes quite successfully

Remember Bernie Madoff and his \$50 billion Ponzi scheme that led to the 2008 financial crash?

Without any evidence that a single trade was ever made, for over 15 years federal investigators ignored all the warning signs.

Wanting his promised exorbitant returns to be real, investors and financial institutions sent him their money.

It was all fake.

Then there was the story of Alice Pike who went into an Atlanta Walmart to buy a few things.

When she got to the register her total bill came to \$1675.

She reached into her purse and brought out two gift cards but the cashier told her they only had a total value of \$2.32.

Reaching into her purse again she said all I have is this, as she handed the cashier a \$1 million bill and then asked for change.

Even if the US treasury made \$1 million dollar bills, which they don't, I don't know of many stores that would have over \$998,325 in one of their cash registers.

The world is inundated with counterfeits trying to be passed off as real and authentic

Watches, jewelry, handbags, cell phones are just a small portion of the items you can find online bearing designer labels and the promise of authenticity but are in reality cheap knockoffs.

And sometimes they can be outright dangerous

Scams also abound for cheap medications and unregulated supplements promising miracle cures

Phishing schemes and phone scams claiming to be from banks, utilities, even government officials and police trying to steal account and personal information abound

The saying is true that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Preying on our fears and desires and hopes and often greed, what we want to be true, it can be difficult to know what's real and authentic

What is true of the things of this world, is even more true of the eternal.

Paul warned Timothy about those who have the form or appearance of godliness but deny its power.

Unfortunately, with all the divisions and fights among believers and churches, where too often differences are allowed to divide rather than our common faith bring us together

The truth of the gospel itself can get lost and make it more difficult for people to know what is real and true.

Imagine someone who knew nothing of God was trying to find a church, how would they choose between Anglican and Reformed, Presbyterian and Methodist, Baptist and Assembly of God, Brethren and Catholic, Quaker and Nazarene, Orthodox and Pentecostal, Charismatic and Seventh Day Adventist, Foursquare and Church of Christ, non-denominational and independent.

or any one of the over 41,000 different denominations in the world

This doesn't even begin to take into account all the cults and other religions.

With so many seemingly competing groups and messages, the message of Jesus can get lost in it all.

In his good-natured way, Max Lucado poked fun of this when he wrote: It has become like an amusement park with flashing lights of ceremony and pomp. Roller coaster thrills of emotion. Loud music. Strange people. Funny clothes. It's like barkers on the midway where preacher persuade, "step right up to the church of Heavenly Hope of High Angels and Happy Hearts...

Over here, madam, that church is too tough on folks like you.

Try us, we teach salvation by sanctification which leads to purification and stabilization. That is unless you prefer the track of predestination which offers...Your attention please sir, try our premillennial, non-charismatic, Calvinistic Creed service for size...you won't be disappointed.

In summarizing, Lucado wrote, no wonder a lady said to me once, I'd like to try Jesus, if I could just get past all the religion.

It can be so confusing, which is real and authentic

It's become too common for churches be known more for their offerings and activities and what they can do for you, than they are for their teaching.

Size often becomes more important than content.

Self-help and personal affirmation and feel-goodism have replaced transformation and discipleship

faith become all about me and what I can get out of it and how it makes me feel rather than ministering and caring for God, others, and the world around us.

It becomes like the cartoon run in the New Yorker magazine several years ago. In it, there is a smiling woman jabbering nonstop to a glum faced companion. The smiling woman finally stops and says, well enough about me. Now let's talk about you. What do you think about me.

What does real and authentic faith look like?
And what does God expect of us?

many try to define it by what they are against rather than who they are for
Pet and hot button issues are given a lot of attention, arousing strong feelings and heated rhetoric

And judging those who may not agree with us on those specific issues rather than what Jude 3 refers to as the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints

As Roland Martin wrote in a recent article, When did it come to the point that being a Christian meant only caring about two issues, abortion and homosexuality?

These are important issues, but ask the nonreligious what being a Christian today means, and based on what we see and read, it's a good bet they will say that followers of Jesus Christ are preoccupied with those two points.

Poverty? Whatever. Homelessness? An afterthought. A widening gap between the haves and have nots? Immaterial. Divorce? The divorce rate of Christians mirrors the national average, so that's no big deal.

The point is that being a Christian should be about more than those two issues

So, what does real and authentic faith to look like?

Perhaps nowhere it defined more forcefully than found in the message of the Old Testament prophets who regularly spoke truth to power, challenging kings and governors, confronted the wealthy and those in positions of privilege and power, and condemned those who were taking advantage of the poor and hurting, those who were helpless and had no one to stand up for them

Amos 8 described them saying, "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"— skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat." (Amos 8:4–6)

God sent the prophets to confront those who were often preaching a faith that was not real.

Who were fastidious about their religious duties and practices, their sacrifices and offerings and far more inclined to attack what they considered the failings of others while ignoring their own.

as Isaiah said, their worship was all in vain because their teachings were nothing but rules taught by men

and among the prophets, none spoke more directly or stated it more clearly than the prophet Micah

who asks in 6:6, “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted one? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He is asking if this all that God wants?
Is this what real and authentic faith looks like?

The answer, of course is no.

Offerings, sacrifices, obedience are meant to be a reflection of what is already true in our hearts, ways to express our love for God not a way to earn or buy it.

It reminds me of the children’s story the Velveteen Rabbit which says,

The skin horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the skin horse understand all about it.

What is real? Asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. Does it mean having things that buzz inside of you and a stick out handle?

Real isn't how you are made, said the skin horse. It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become real.

Does it hurt? Asked the rabbit.

Sometimes, said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. When you are real you don't mind being hurt.

Does it happen all at once, like being wound up he asked, or bit by bit?

It doesn't happen all at once, said the Skin Horse. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby, but these things don't matter at all, because once you are real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.

If its' not sacrifices and offerings, what is real, and true and authentic faith?

What does God expect of us? Micah asks.

Is it obeying rules and laws? Working hard to prove I'm worthy? Fighting against the sins of others?

The answer, Micah 6:8 says, He has shown you, oh man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

This is what real faith looks like and it is none of these but he says it is

1. He demands that that we act justly

Justice concerns how we deal with and treat others

Are we doing what is right and fair.

Are we being honest and truthful with them, not just in business and work but also in our personal affairs

Do we treat others as people with value and worth, not just objects to be used

Do we respect the inherent dignity and worth of even those we disagree with, for they too are loved by and made in the image of God?
Are we treating them with respect or contempt?

Justice, it is a central part of real faith and the gospel message.
It is close to the heart of God whom both Isaiah and Malachi declare to be a God of justice
A God whom Jeremiah says loves justice
And whom Zephaniah says morning by morning dispenses justice

So, Micah asks what does the Lord require of us? To act justly
But this isn't all that Micah says God expects.
In addition to justice, he says

2. He also demands that we love mercy, or some versions translate this as to love kindness

Again, real faith and what God expects of us is concerned primarily with how we treat others

Mercy has to do with treating others with love and compassion not judgement and condemnation

It is especially concerned with how we treat the downtrodden and suffering, the rejected and abused and lonely.

All those society doesn't value and rejects as of lesser worth

Mercy has to do with genuinely caring about the welfare of others without trying to define whether they are worth it or not

There are no conditions set on whom we are to show kindness, Jew or Muslim, gay or straight, progressive or neo-conservative, immigrant or native born!

As someone said, according to the Biblical record, a truly spiritual person is a truly caring person.

And it should give us pause to remember that mercy, like justice, is one of the attributes of God himself, describing what he is and how he treats each of us

- Deut. 4:31 Declares that our God is a merciful God who will not abandon or destroy or forget his covenant with us.
- Neh. 9:31 says he is a gracious and merciful God
- Daniel 9:9 states that the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving even though we have rebelled against Him
- *“I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,”* (Jeremiah 9:24)

real and authentic faith must be expressed through both justice and mercy!

In a book titled Authentic Faith, author Gary Thomas wrote, we must beware of the warped spirituality that separates “the spiritual life” from our life of caring for others. In a self-based Christianity, faith is almost entirely about how we learn to overcome our sins, grow in spiritual disciplines, and build healthier, happier families (in other words, it’s all about me). These are wonderful things, he states, but authentic faith urges us to take our newfound victory over temptation, our strong character forged by practicing the disciplines, and the stability offered by having a strong family, and then put them to use by reaching out to those who need the love of God the most. This other-focused faith is not a new teaching. It is the model that our Lord himself taught and practiced.

He has shown you oh man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly, to love mercy

3. And the third thing Micah says God demands of real faith, is to walk humbly with our God

For as 1 Peter 5:5 says God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

Many of the religious leaders, not just of Micah’s day, but Jesus’ and of every age, were guilty of tremendous spiritual pride

They thought primarily of themselves, that they were right and anyone who disagreed with them was wrong

Concerned with their reputations and achievements and self-interests

Proud of their morality, what they did and didn't do, how good they were and how faithfully they kept the commandments and laws
How often they prayed, how much they gave, how much time they spent fasting and performing their religious duties, all while pointing fingers and judging others who didn't live up to their standards

It was all for show

Fred Smith said humility is not denying the power you have. It is realizing that the power comes through you not from you.

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." (Romans 12:3)

It's not just Micah for whom Justice, Mercy, Humility are traits of real and authentic faith.

They are a central part of the message for all the prophets

- ***Amos 5:24 declares, "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"***
- ***In Hosea 6:6 God says, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."***
- ***"This is what the LORD Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.'" (Zechariah 7:9–10)***
- ***Isaiah 7:9-10 says we must, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."***
- ***And God told the prophet Jeremiah "This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place." (Jeremiah 22:3)***

And of our Lord himself, the prophet Isaiah said:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.” (Isaiah 42:1–4)

Justice, Mercy, Humility are not merely accessories to our faith, they are central to it.

The message of Micah and all the prophets is that God holds us accountable for how we treat one another!

What is real is not just correct belief but also correct practice.

- ***As James 1:27 states, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*** (James 1:27)

Again, Gary Thomas wrote, The Christlike life is not simply about practicing impeccable morality and overcoming temptation and faithfully performing a few spiritual disciplines. All of these were done by the Pharisees far more faithfully than any of us will ever perform them, and yet Christ himself said these religious zealots had missed God’s intention. To experience Christ’s joy, passion, and fulfillment, we need to adopt an entirely new mind-set and motivation. We are invited to join our Lord in living for the glory of the Father instead of for our own reputation, and we are called to give ourselves over to the salvation and sanctification of Christ’s bride, the church, rather than be consumed by our own welfare. This holy forgetfulness is the most genuine mark of true faith, the evidence of God’s merciful grace in our lives.

the Lord has showed us what is good and what the Lord does require of us. To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God!