

We all need **JUSTICE**
We all need **MERCY**

JUST MERCY

IN SELECT THEATERS DECEMBER 25
IN THEATERS EVERYWHERE JANUARY 10

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO THE FILM

“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”
Micah 6:8

About the Movie: **JUST MERCY**

The film **Just Mercy** is based on an award-winning book of the same name by attorney **Bryan Stevenson**, played by Michael B. Jordan. Raised in rural Delaware, Stevenson regularly attended the African Methodist Episcopal Church, where he developed a strong sense of justice and compassion. He earned a law degree and Masters in Public Policy from Harvard, and in 1989 he launched the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama, which is committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, along with challenging racial and economic injustice, and protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society. EJI has won reversals, relief, or release from prison for over 140 wrongly condemned prisoners on death row.

One of those stories is at the center of **Just Mercy**. Walter McMillian, played by Jamie Foxx, was convicted and sentenced to death for a murder he did not commit. For more than four years, Bryan Stevenson fought for justice and mercy against a system stacked against him and his client at every turn.

Stevenson has gained international recognition for his work defending the poor and unfairly incarcerated, and has said, “The opposite of poverty is not wealth...the opposite of poverty is justice.”



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Photo Credit: Jake Giles
Netter. (L-R) MICHAEL B.
JORDAN as Bryan
Stevenson and JAMIE
FOXX as Walter McMillian
in Warner Bros. Pictures'
drama JUST MERCY,
a Warner Bros.
Pictures release.

We all need JUSTICE

AFTER A LIFETIME OF FIGHTING INJUSTICE, STEVENSON CONCLUDES: “THE SYSTEM TREATS YOU BETTER IF YOU ARE RICH AND GUILTY THAN IF YOU ARE POOR AND INNOCENT.”

In **Just Mercy**, Walter McMillian, a black man, is presumed guilty and wrongly convicted of brutally killing a white woman. Walter maintains his innocence and there's evidence supporting his alibi, including testimonies from friends and family, yet all of this is disregarded. In pursuit of the truth, attorney Bryan Stevenson uncovers damning evidence that the testimony of the witnesses for the prosecution was coerced and false and the authorities know it.



© 2019 WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC. Photo Credit: Jake Giles Netter. (L-R) MICHAEL B. JORDAN as Bryan Stevenson and JAMIE FOXX as Walter McMillian in Warner Bros. Pictures' drama JUST MERCY, a Warner Bros. Pictures release.

Justice is about discovering what is true, doing what is right. It's about truth and consequences. *If* there is a need for punishment, then justice is about making sure it fits the crime. It's not about getting even or making someone pay so as to satisfy a need for revenge. Justice is about setting wrong things right. The U.S. legal system is built on the premise of “innocent until proven guilty” where the burden is on the prosecution to prove culpability.

“HOPELESSNESS IS THE ENEMY OF JUSTICE”

– BRYAN STEVENSON

Lady Justice is supposed to have a blindfold and a set of even scales meant to ensure impartial and equal “*justice for all.*” But what happens when it seems she has lost her blindfold, when someone has their thumb on the scale, when truth is perverted, and true justice is elusive?

Reflection: HOW ARE WE MEANT TO RESPOND TO INJUSTICE?

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus tells His disciples a parable about an unrighteous judge and a poor widow who repeatedly asks him for legal protection. The judge repeatedly denies her any assistance, yet by persisting, she ultimately prevails. Even though the judge does not fear God, nor respect men, he relents “*lest by continually coming she wear me out.*” In the original language, it is more explicit: “*lest she give me a black eye!*”

Questions to discuss

What message did Jesus convey with this parable? What enabled the widow to persevere? How might that apply to situations in your life? How do you respond to injustice? Will you speak up when needed? Where do you find hope?

We all need **MERCY**

©2019 WARNER BROS
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Credit: Jake Giles Netter. (L-R)
JAMIE FOXX as Walter McMillian
and MICHAEL B. JORDAN as
Bryan Stevenson in Warner Bros.
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**“EACH ONE OF US IS MORE THAN THE
WORST THING WE HAVE DONE.”**

Just Mercy shows us the simple reality of the preciousness of life and the worth of every person. Each one of us matters. Bryan’s reminder to the inmates wrestling with despair is, “Whatever you did, your life is still meaningful.”

The oath we take in court is to tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Walter is innocent of the crime for which he was wrongfully condemned; but in his life overall he was not altogether “innocent.” In the past, he had guilty of adultery which hurt his wife and greatly affected his family.

The truth is, no one is entirely innocent; nor are they completely guilty. All of us are guilty of something. There is not one of us who is perfect and without sin. We all need mercy.

**JESUS WARNED TOWARD THE END OF THE AGE,
“BECAUSE LAWLESSNESS IS INCREASED, MOST
PEOPLE’S LOVE WILL GROW COLD.” MT.24:12**

Jesus told us the greatest commandments are to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength” and to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt.22:34-40). In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), he told us who our “neighbor” is: the one in need. We follow Jesus’s teaching when we show *mercy* to those in need.

Reflection: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? WHO ARE THE LEAST OF THESE?

In teaching on judgment, Jesus talks about the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the needy, the sick, and those in prison. In Mt.25:31-46, the central difference between the “sheep” and the “goats” was how they had treated all of these people, as that was how they had treated Jesus himself. *“Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”* The converse is also true, *“In as much as you did NOT do it to the least of these, you did not do it unto Me.”* To which he will say, *“Depart from Me...”*

Questions to discuss

How willing are you to forgive those who have wronged you? Is there something you consider unforgivable? (why/why not?) How do you determine someone’s value? Who is your neighbor, the ‘least’ in your community? How do you respond to those in need? What does it mean to show someone mercy?

We all need GRACE

HEB.4:16 INVITES US TO “DRAW NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE MERCY AND MAY FIND GRACE TO HELP IN OUR TIME OF NEED.”

Civil governments must bring swift and appropriate judgment against wrongdoing, so as to provide a clear deterrent against those who would conspire to do evil (See Romans 13:1-7). But administering justice with impartial judgement is difficult, so governments must guard against bias and prejudice.

At the same time, *individuals* in a society have the ability to extend mercy and grant forgiveness, enabling redemption. Forgiveness and mercy don't mean removing one from the consequences of wrongdoing, but along with grace, they are what give people the *power to change*. Again, they don't excuse wrongdoing or overlook it; but they give the wrongdoer the impetus and power to change.

Jesus says: “Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; **and by the standard of measure, it will be measured unto you.**” (Mt.7:1-2) We must avoid taking a small part or instance in someone's life and measuring the whole. We should look at our own faults, as some day our measuring stick will be used to measure us.



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Photo Credit: JAKE GILES
NETTER. MICHAEL B. JORDAN as Bryan Stevenson in Warner Bros. Pictures' drama JUST MERCY, a Warner Bros. Pictures release.

WE ALL NEED MERCY, WE ALL NEED JUSTICE, AND PERHAPS WE ALL NEED SOME MEASURE OF UNMERITED GRACE
– BRYAN STEVENSON

Reflection: SEEING THE SIN OF THE ACCUSED THROUGH OUR OWN SINFULNESS.

The film's central message is the power of '**Just Mercy**'. In the Bible (John 8:1-11), the scribes and Pharisees bring before Jesus a woman "*caught in the very act of adultery*." The law demanded that she be put to death by stoning, and they wanted to test Jesus. If he absolved her, they could accuse him of transgressing the Law. If he condemned her, they could catch him contradicting his message of mercy toward sinners...

Questions to discuss

*How would you handle this situation? What would you say?
How would you rule?*

Jesus knew their intentions. Like the case in **Just Mercy**, they had already rendered their verdict; now they just needed to build their case to convict not only the woman, but Jesus as well.

Jesus remained silent, but then declared: "**He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**" One by one, the accusers dropped their rocks and departed, until none remained. Jesus then said, "*Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?*" To which she replied, "*No one, Lord.*" Then Jesus declared, "*Neither do I condemn you; go your way. And from now on, go and sin no more.*"

He did not condone her actions, turn a blind eye, or compromise with evil. Rather, by extending mercy to the woman, he *invited her to change*, releasing the love and grace that would make change possible. His goal was to redeem, to save (John 3:16-17). Jesus showed her **Just Mercy** – thereby revealing the genuine heart of God.