

“Twelve Angry Men” starring Henry Fonda, Lee J. Cobb, E.G. Marshall, & Martin Balsam, 1957, NR, 96 minutes

Major themes:

- Justice
- Prejudice
- Reason
- Conflict resolution
- Mercy
- Peacemaking

Background info:

- The filming was completed in less than three weeks on a budget of about \$350,000.
- All but three minutes of the film was shot inside the bare and confining, sixteen by twenty-four foot "jury room". The director used increasingly longer focal lengths as the film shooting went on, creating a greater feeling of claustrophobia. He also had the actors all stay in the same room for hours on end and do their lines over and over without taping them. This was to give them a real taste of what it would be like to be cooped up in a room with the same people.
- The "unusual-looking knife" in this movie is an Italian stiletto switchblade with a Filipino-style Kriss blade.
- The movie is commonly used in business schools and workshops to illustrate team dynamics and conflict resolution techniques.
- In spite of winning multiple awards including an Academy Award nomination for Best Producer, Henry Fonda vowed that he would never produce a movie again, fearing that failing as a producer might derail his acting career.

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

- The film is today viewed as a classic, highly regarded from both a critical and popular viewpoint. The American Film Institute named Juror 8 as one of the top 50 greatest movie heroes of the 20th century, and includes "*12 Angry Men*" in the top 50 most inspiring films and in the top 10 courtroom drama films. The film holds a 100% approval rating on the review aggregate website, Rotten Tomatoes.
- Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor credits seeing "*12 Angry Men*" while she was in college with influencing her decision to pursue a career in law. She was particularly inspired by immigrant Juror 11's monologue on his reverence for the American justice system.
- Currently in the United States every person accused of a crime punishable by incarceration for more than six months has a constitutional right to a trial by jury. The basis for this is from both Article III of the U.S. Constitution (judicial power, courts, judges, jurisdiction, cases, controversies, grants of jurisdiction, original and appellate jurisdiction, trial by jury, treason) and the Sixth Amendment (speedy trial, public trial, impartial jury, vicinage, notice of accusation, confrontation, compulsory process, assistance of counsel, self-representation). The Fourteenth Amendment applies this mandate to the states. However, in practice, approximately 90% of criminal cases in the United States are settled by plea bargain rather than by a jury trial. In 1898 the Supreme Court held that the jury must be composed of at least twelve persons. In 1970, however, the Supreme Court held that the twelve persons requirement was a "historical accident", and upheld six-person juries in both criminal and civil cases. There is controversy over smaller juries, with proponents arguing that they are more efficient and opponents arguing that they lead to fluctuating verdicts. Unanimous jury verdicts have been standard in Western law.
- There is no set format for jury deliberations, and the jury will take a period of time to settle into discussing the evidence, often lead by a foreman. The result of these discussions is likely to be that one interpretation is shown to be the most reasonable, and a verdict is thus achieved.

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

- Scholarly research on jury behavior in American non-capital criminal felony trials reveals that juror outcomes appear to track the opinions of the median juror, rather than the opinions of the extreme juror on the panel. Although juries must render unanimous verdicts, in most criminal trials they behave in practice as if they were operating using a majority rules voting system. Much of the research on social conformity suggests that individuals tend to lose their sense of individuality when faced with powerful group forces.
- “*Proof beyond a reasonable doubt*” is the standard of evidence required to validate a criminal conviction in the U.S. The standard that must be met by the prosecution's evidence in a criminal prosecution is that no other logical explanation can be derived from the facts except that the defendant committed the crime, thereby overcoming the presumption that a person is innocent until proven guilty. It does not mean that no doubt exists as to the accused's guilt, but only that no reasonable doubt is possible from the evidence presented. The main reason that the high proof standard of reasonable doubt is used in criminal trials is that such proceedings can result in the deprivation of a defendant's liberty or even in his or her death.
- In the United States, juries must be instructed to apply the reasonable doubt standard when determining the guilt or innocence of a criminal defendant, but there is much disagreement as to whether the jury should be given a definition of “*reasonable doubt*.”

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Scriptures:

Isaiah 58:6 – 9 (NLT) – *“this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the LORD will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply. Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!”*

James 2:12 -13 (The Message) – *“Talk and act like a person expecting to be judged by the Rule that sets us free. For if you refuse to act kindly, you can hardly expect to be treated kindly. Kind mercy wins over harsh judgment every time.”*

Proverbs 25:15 (The Message) – *“Patient persistence pierces through indifference; gentle speech breaks down rigid defenses.”*

Psalms 25:7 (NLT) – *“Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth. Remember me in the light of your unfailing love, for you are merciful, O LORD.”*

Matthew 5:3 – 10 (NLT) – *“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”*

Matthew 7:1 – 2 (The Message) – *“Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical*

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own."

Major characters:

- Juror # 1 – Foreman of the jury; high school football coach
- Juror # 2 – Bank teller
- Juror # 3 – Businessman (owns messenger service) & distraught father; antagonist
- Juror # 4 – Stockbroker
- Juror # 5 – Young man from a violent slum; Baltimore Orioles fan
- Juror # 6 – House painter
- Juror # 7 – Salesman; sports fan
- Juror # 8 – Architect; protagonist. Identified as "Davis" at the end
- Juror # 9 – Elderly man. Identified as "McCardle" at the end
- Juror # 10 – Garage owner
- Juror # 11 – European watchmaker; naturalized American citizen
- Juror # 12 – Advertising executive

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Discussion points:

1. Have the issues presented in this film (which was made more than 50 years ago) improved?
2. How can we be voices of patient reasoning to bring about God's Kingdom in situations around us?
3. *"He's a common ignorant slob. He don't even speak good English"* . . . What are some of the ways prejudice is experienced in our era – by individuals, by groups?
4. How did our protagonist, juror #8, help bring resolution to the conflicts that arose?
5. Consider our judicial system. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of trial by jury. How does this compare to what the Bible has to say about justice? What are God's priorities?
6. What are the implications of a system in which a guilty defendant could be deemed innocent or an innocent defendant could be deemed guilty?
7. Juror # 6 says, *"I'm not used to supposin'. I'm just a workin' man. My boss does all the supposin'."* Discuss the importance of thinking and discernment and guarding against passivity and apathy.
8. It's easy to judge a situation or someone's character quickly, but as we see in this movie, things aren't always as they seem. How can our evaluations of others affect them? How can we be affected?
9. Juror # 10 remarked, *"I'm sick and tired of facts! You can twist 'em any way you like you know what I mean?"* How do we respond to the twisting of facts?