

**“Just Mercy” starring Michael B. Jordan, Jamie Foxx, Brie Larson, 2019, PG-13, 137 minutes**

**Major themes:**

- Justice
- Mercy
- Racism
- Poverty
- Advocacy
- Capital punishment
- Death row
- Hopelessness
- Kindness
- Listening

**Major characters:**

- Bryan Stevenson
- Eva Ansley
- Sheriff Tate
- Walter McMillian
- Ralph Myers
- Tommy Chapman
- Darnell Houston
- Anthony Ray Hinton

## Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

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### Background info:

- This legal drama film tells the true story of Walter McMillian based on a 2014 memoir of the same name written by defense attorney Bryan Stevenson.
- The film's taglines include, *"Every generation has its hero. Meet ours."* and *"This is about all of us."*
- Most of the events take place in Alabama starting in 1986. Monroeville, Alabama, was the hometown of Harper Lee and the inspiration for the fictional town in her classic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Coincidentally, the name of the real sheriff in this story is Tom Tate; the fictitious sheriff in Harper Lee's book is Heck Tate.
- Bryan Stevenson grew up in Delaware. When he was 16, his grandfather was murdered. In adulthood, Stevenson said of this, *"Because my grandfather was older, his murder seemed particularly cruel. But I came from a world where we valued redemption over revenge."*
- Stevenson earned a J.D. degree from Harvard Law School and a master's degree in Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government.
- The Equal Justice Initiative is a non-profit organization, based in Montgomery, Alabama, that provides legal representation to prisoners who may have been wrongly convicted of crimes, poor prisoners without effective representation, and others who may have been denied a fair trial. It guarantees the defense of anyone in Alabama in a death penalty case.
- The film premiered in September 2019 and released widely in January 2020. Following the death of George Floyd on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Warner Bros. offered this film for free to rent on streaming throughout the month of June 2020 in response to ongoing and widespread protests against police brutality and racism in policing.

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### Scriptures:

Micah 6:8-9a (NLT) – *“O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Fear the LORD if you are wise!”*

Proverbs 21:15 (NIV) – *“When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.”*

Proverbs 21:2-3 (The Message) – *“We justify our actions by appearances; God examines our motives. Clean living before God and justice with our neighbors mean far more to God than religious performance.”*

Jeremiah 22:3 (The Message) – *“This is God’s Message: Attend to matters of justice. Set things right between people. Rescue victims from their exploiters. Don’t take advantage of the homeless, the orphans, the widows. Stop the murdering!”*

Psalms 82:2-4 (NIV) – *“How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”*

Proverbs 21:7 (ESV) – *“The violence of the wicked will sweep them away, because they refuse to do what is just.”*

Isaiah 1:15-17 (NLT) – *“When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims. Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.”*

Psalms 106:1-3 (NIV) – *“Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord or fully declare his praise? Blessed are those who act justly, who always do what is right.”*

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### Discussion points:

1. What does the title of this film mean to you? to those who are convicted? to those on death row? to our system of justice?
2. Who has the right to end someone's life?
3. What can we learn from the way Bryan Stevenson chose to speak and act?
4. William James, who is known as the "father of psychology," wrote, "*No matter how full a reservoir of maxims one may possess, and no matter how good one's sentiments may be, if one has not taken advantage of every concrete opportunity to act, one's character may remain entirely unaffected for the better. With mere good intentions, hell is proverbially paved . . . The weeping of a Russian lady over the fictitious personages in a play, while her coachman is freezing to death on his seat outside, is the sort of thing that everywhere happens on a less glaring scale . . . One becomes filled with emotions which habitually pass without prompting to any deed, and so the inertly sentimental condition is kept up. The remedy would be, never to suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterward in some active way. Let the expression be the least thing in the world . . . but let it not fail to take place.*" Why is it important to do something after our emotions are stirred (in contrast to just feeling the emotions)?
5. What needs to happen in your life and in the lives of those around you in order to effect lasting change in dismantling racism?