

MORE THAN A HASHTAG

WEEK 2

BIG IDEA

Love mercy.

BIBLE

Micah 6v6-8; Luke 7v36-50; Hosea 6v6

WHAT?

WE'RE BACK FOR WEEK 2 OF THIS SERIES

VIDEO: Mean Tweets ▲

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If possible, show a brief clip from an episode of "Celebrities Read Mean Tweets," from Jimmy Kimmel, but heads up: **none of these videos are safe to play in their entirety because of language.** If you have the ability to do some basic video editing on your phone or computer, we recommend creating your own compilation of tweets that are both clean and read by celebrities your students would recognize. If you'd rather not show a video, you can read the tweets out loud.*
- Wow, people are so mean sometimes, aren't they? Especially on the internet, people can be merciless. If you've ever wandered into the comments section of YouTube, you know what I mean.

DISCUSSION ▲

- **Why do you think it's so easy for people to be mean to each other?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give your students a few moments to share and discuss.*

TALK: PEOPLE CAN BE MERCILESS

- Like the "Celebrities Read Mean Tweets" video we just saw, sometimes people get attacked online for no reason at all. Those attacks are simply hateful. But sometimes people get attacked online because someone feels wronged by them and is looking for justice.
- People might start hashtags, declare campaigns, or rally their friends to go after someone online because they believe they've done something wrong and must be punished.
- There are countless stories of people who have received so much negative online backlash because of their bad behavior that they've lost their jobs or even had to change their names.
- This is where things can get complicated, as far as "justice" is concerned.
- Justice (the subject of our current series) is about making wrong things right.
- Usually, making wrong things right requires someone to be punished or held accountable for their actions. But can our desire to punish someone who has done wrong ever go too far? Is there another way? How do we hold people accountable for their actions in a way that honors God?
- Last week, we said that God is calling each of us to "do something" to fight for justice. Today, we're going to begin talking about how (and how not) to do that.

DISCUSSION

- **Have you ever seen someone get attacked for their bad behavior? What happened?**
- INSTRUCTIONS: *Give your students a few moments to share and discuss.*
- There are countless stories of people who have received so much negative online backlash because of their bad behavior that they've lost their jobs or even had to change their names.
- This is where things can get complicated, as far as "justice" is concerned.
- **Let's recap: how would you define "justice?"**
- INSTRUCTIONS: *Give your students a few moments to share and discuss.*
- Justice (the subject of our current series) is about making wrong things right.

- **What role do you think punishment plays in justice?**
- INSTRUCTIONS: *Give your students a few moments to share and discuss.*
- Usually, making wrong things right requires someone to be punished or held accountable for their actions. But can our desire to punish someone who has done wrong ever go too far? Is there another way? How do we hold people accountable for their actions in a way that honors God?
- Last week, we said that God is calling each of us to "do something" to fight for justice. Today, we're going to begin talking about how (and how not) to do that.

SO WHAT?

WHAT IS MERCY?

SCRIPTURE: Micah 6v8 ▲

- Last week, we read a passage of Scripture that I'd like to revisit.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Micah 6v8.*
- Today I want us to focus on two words from this passage: "love mercy." But what is mercy?

TALK: JESUS EMBODIED MERCY ▲

- I think the idea of God's mercy is best defined in the person of Jesus. His life embodied mercy.
- Sometimes mercy is defined in contrast to grace, but most of the time mercy and grace go together. Some might say it like this: If grace is like "getting a gift we don't deserve," then mercy is "not getting what we do deserve"—that is, punishment for our sins.
- By taking on our punishment for sin, Jesus displayed mercy. We don't have to die a sinner's death or endure eternal separation from God because, in an act of great mercy, Jesus died on our behalf.
- Because of Jesus, we did not get the punishment we deserved—that's mercy. Instead, we get the gift of eternal life if we turn from our sins, and

put our faith and trust in Jesus—that's grace.

STORY: Talk about a time you received mercy. ▲

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Briefly share a story (or have another adult share a story) about a time when someone showed you mercy after your bad behavior.*

VIDEO: Les Miserables (the "Back to God" scene) ▲

- There's a scene from a movie (and musical, and book) that I love, called *Les Miserables*. I think it illustrates this idea well.
- In this story, there is a man named Jean Valjean. Before the story begins, Jean is imprisoned for stealing bread in order to feed his family. After nineteen years, he is finally released from prison and must learn how to live a normal life.
- But after so many years in prison, Jean Valjean is a mess and isn't sure how to live a normal life. But then something happens that changes his life forever.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play a clip from the film.*
- Did you catch this quote? Let me repeat it for you, in case you didn't.
- **NARRATIVE VERSION:** "Don't forget, don't you ever forget. You've promised to become a new man . . . Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil. With this silver, I bought your soul. I've ransomed you from fear and hatred and now I give you back to God."

DISCUSSION: Discuss the video clip together. ▲

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give your students a few moments to share and discuss the following questions, either as a group or in pairs at their seats.*
 - How was mercy demonstrated in this scene?
 - Why do you think the Bishop did what he did?
 - How do you think this act of mercy changed Jean Valjean?
- It seems that the Bishop was able to extend mercy to Jean Valjean because the Bishop had an understanding of God's mercy and forgiveness over his own life.

- A shallow understanding of justice would reason that, because Jean Valjean stole from the Bishop, justice would be served if Jean Valjean was punished as a criminal and sent back to prison. Jean Valjean should have to "pay the price" of his sins by serving more time.
- But the Bishop had a deeper understanding of mercy. Someone who has experienced God's mercy isn't satisfied with punishment or revenge. When we experience God's mercy, it transforms us, then empowers us to show love and mercy to others.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7v36-50 ▲

- Let's take a look at another passage of Scripture that demonstrates this.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Luke 7v36-50, then revisit verses 47-48.*
- This sinful woman understood who Jesus was. She knew he had the power to forgive sins and that he was loving and merciful.
- When the woman learned that Jesus was at the house of Simon the Pharisee, she gathered all her courage and went to find him, despite the fact that the house was full of men who were hardly known for being merciful, let alone accepting of someone with her reputation—a prostitute. In the eyes of these men, the fact that she had the nerve to show up at the house uninvited confirmed their opinion that she was not a respectable woman.
- When she got to Jesus, she wept so much that her tears wet his feet. She didn't wipe away her tears with the back of her hand or her sleeve, though. She used her own tears to wash his feet and, instead of a towel to dry his feet, she used her own hair.
- She kissed Jesus' dirty, calloused, and probably not-very-nice-smelling feet over and over again.
- This was a deeply humble, deeply intimate, and deeply moving moment for this woman. She didn't do this as an act, or out of a sense of duty. It was an authentic response to God's love and mercy.
- In that day and culture, it was customary to wash the feet of your guests, and to give a kiss on their cheek as a greeting. Jesus pointed out that his host did neither for him, yet this woman did.
- It was also important that rabbis, teachers, and men of "good reputation" not be seen in the company of women—particularly prostitutes! For Jesus to allow this woman to touch him at all, let alone weep at his feet and kiss him over and over again, was more shocking than breaking news on TMZ!

This was definitely the kind of video that would go viral on Worldstar Hip Hop.

- In this story, Jesus "flipped the script" like he was so good at doing. He used this sinful woman as an example of what it means to love deeply.
- This sinful woman acknowledged Jesus was the Son of God—the one who has the power to forgive sins, and the one who has shown great mercy. But the Pharisees, the religious "experts," were unable to see Jesus for who He really was.
- Because this woman experienced the love of God in a way that the Pharisees had not, she was able to express her love for God in a way the Pharisees could not understand.

DISCUSSION

- **Read Hosea 6v6. How would you have explained this verse to Simon, the Pharisee from today's story?**
- Back then, remember that people often made sacrifices and offerings in order to please God.
- INSTRUCTIONS: *Give your students a few moments to share and discuss.*
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NOW WHAT?

IF YOU WANT TO DO JUSTICE, LOVE MERCY

TALK: To do justice, love mercy

- There is so much wrong in the world. Every day, people frustrate and disappoint us—so much so, that sometimes we want to see them "brought to justice."
- There is a time and a place for people to experience consequences for their actions. Experiencing consequences for our sin is often a necessary step in the justice process.
- But aren't you glad Jesus chose to show you mercy?

REFLECTION

- Remember what we learned from the example of the Bishop and, of course, the example of Jesus.
- God isn't motivated by a desire to punish us. God wants to see us transformed. God's mercy has the power to cause that kind of transformation in our lives, then empower us to show that same mercy to others. When it comes to justice, God is calling us to **love mercy**.
- For a few moments, here's what I'd like you to consider these could be reflected upon, in the form of a prayer, or even discussed:
- **Have you ever needed to be "forgiven much?"**
- **How can you allow the forgiveness you've received to transform you?**
- **Have you ever refused to show mercy to someone else?**
- **Has anyone hurt you recently? How might you show them mercy instead of taking revenge?**

MUSIC: "Forgiven," by Crowder

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play the lyric video or perform the song, "Forgiven," by Crowder, as you close.*