



Just Mercy – Movie

This is a powerful movie with disturbing scenes and challenging portrayals of the criminal justice system and racial inequality. As with most books that become movies, the book is a better and more comprehensive story of the life and work of Bryan Stevenson. But the movie does an excellent job of following the primary storyline of one of Stevenson's first clients, Walter McMillian, wrongly accused of murdering a young white woman in Alabama. Throughout the movie, viewers are confronted with the systematic racism that puts an inordinate number of African American men in prison, and specifically, on death row.

This is an important movie for young people to watch. It is a vivid portrayal of Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." And Matthew 25:36 "I was in prison and you visited me." Stevenson takes on cases that seem hopeless and works, if not to find justice, then to be a last solace and to say, you mattered enough to fight for, and I will be with you until the end.

This movie is not for younger youth, unless parents might be part of the viewing as well and realize the content may be difficult. It is sure to shake youth's understanding of the criminal justice system as being just. Scenes of executions by the state, of police brutality and overt racism are painful and will not be forgotten. Before you show this movie, youth and parents should be prepared with that information and be willing to commit to discussing the movie afterwards. For many youths, immediately following the film is too raw and soon to talk about the movie. Planning time for discussion the next day may be better.

Questions following the viewing:

1. Word or phrase to describe your feelings after watching Just Mercy? Is that the same word or phrase you would use after reflecting on the movie for a few days?
2. The movie's title, and the book's, is Just Mercy. What do you see that meaning? What does it mean in light of this movie?
3. Where is there evidence of forgiveness? Reconciliation? Hope?
4. What surprised you in the movie?
5. What was most disappointing to you about the story?
6. What were ways that Stevenson and McMillian were intimidated by the criminal justice system/law enforcement?
7. What did you learn, that was new/difficult/gave you pause to reflect from this movie?
8. How do you think Stevenson's encounter with police outside his own apartment formed his perspective on his work?
9. Did Walter ever obtain justice? Mercy?

10. "My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice..." This is a quote from Bryan Stevenson. How do you respond to this quote?