

JUSTICE FOR ALL

WEEK 1 (HYBRID)

BIG IDEA

Genesis 37:1-11; I Corinthians 13:1-7

Bible

Genesis 37:1-11; I Corinthians 13:1-7

WHAT?

QUESTION | "What comes to mind when you hear 'justice for all?'"

- Welcome to our new series, *Justice for All!* **When you hear that phrase, what comes to mind?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- When you hear the word "justice," you might think of the American pledge of allegiance, or the Snyder cut, or court TV, or maybe a Metallica album. But does anyone think about love?

QUESTION | "What's something extreme a fictional character has done for love?"

- We'll come back to the idea of justice in a minute, but for now let's talk about love. Think about some of the love stories from your favorite books, movies, or shows. **What's something extreme one of those characters did for love?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- Whether you're into love stories or not, there's something about them we can all relate to. We all want to feel loved by other people, and these extreme gestures of love we see in stories definitely accomplish that.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **What's your favorite fictional love story and why?**

- *** If love is a combination of feelings, words, and actions, which do you think is least important and why? Which is most important?**

STORY | Talk about a time you saw love expressed in an extreme way.

- We've all seen extreme gestures of love portrayed in books and on film, but sometimes we see them happen in real life too.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a lighthearted story from your own life (or ask a student or volunteer to tell a story) about a time when you either went above and beyond to show someone love or you saw someone else do so. Make this story either cute or funny — you'll get to more substantial examples in a minute. You might talk about a dramatic prom proposal or a time when you tried to impress a crush and failed miserably.*
- Sometimes we do ridiculous things for love. But there's a not-so-ridiculous truth underneath these ridiculous gestures. Deep down, we all understand that . . .
 - Love isn't just an emotion you feel.
 - Love isn't just a word you say.
 - Love is something you demonstrate with your actions.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **Who is someone who makes you feel loved? How do they make you feel that way?**
 - *** Why do you think the people we love most are sometimes the people we hurt most?**

STORY | Talk about a time you wanted revenge against a loved one who hurt you.

- But sometimes the people we love don't do this very well — at least, not in our opinions. Sometimes the people who are supposed to love us don't show it with their actions.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a student or volunteer to tell a story) about a time you wanted revenge against someone you loved who hurt you or made you angry. Try to choose a story that is relatable to all of your students. Share what happened, how you felt, and what kind of revenge you wanted to take.*
- Have you ever wanted to get even with someone who hurt you? I mean, they hurt *you*, so it's only fair if they experience some pain in return, right? I've get it. I've been there. When we're hurt, we want revenge! We want consequences! We want justice!

QUESTION | "What is justice?"

- Now that we've sort-of defined love, let's see if we can sort-of define justice. What do you think? **What is justice?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- **Talking about justice can be tough. When we try to define, many of us define justice as . . .**
 - **A punishment.** We see it as the thing that happens to people when they're caught doing something wrong, like prison.
 - **Revenge.** We see getting justice as the same thing as getting revenge against someone who hurt us.
 - **A trend.** Some see justice as a trendy term that gets thrown around in politics, at protests, or on social media.
- Sometimes our desire for justice is well-intentioned, sometimes it's misguided, and sometimes it's a little bit of both. But when we realize our idea of justice is actually just about revenge, there's a good chance we've gotten it wrong.
 - There's this saying, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." It's a reminder that, when we're all trying to get revenge every time we're hurt, the cycle of pain never ends.
 - But what's the alternative? What do we do when something unjust happens to us? How should we respond when someone really hurts us? How do we balance forgiving others with standing up for ourselves? And is it possible that "getting justice" is about more than just punishing people who've hurt us?
- For the next few weeks, we're going to talk about what God says justice is (and isn't) — and we'll see what justice and love have to do with each other too.

SO WHAT?

OBJECT LESSON | A Coat of Many Colors

- For the next few weeks, we're going to talk about justice by taking a look at a family from the Old Testament (that's in the Bible) that not only experienced, but also carried out, unspeakable injustice.
- At the center of this story is a guy named Joseph.
 - Joseph was the second youngest sibling in a family with eleven brothers. As one of the younger of the bunch, the Bible seems to suggest Joseph was kind of a tattletale. His father often asked him to "keep an eye on" his older brothers.
 - By the way, Joseph's older brothers were actually his half brothers. Yep, Joseph was raised in a blended family. Joseph and his younger brother, Benjamin, had a different mother than their older brothers, and this created some serious sibling rivalry.
 - Joseph's brothers were convinced their father, Jacob, loved Joseph more than them. And guess what? They were right. Jacob's favoritism created an "us versus them" mentality in their home.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, find yourself a fancy coat or [robe](#)! It could be a neon windbreaker, your grandma's old fur coat, or something you found in the church prop closet. When you introduce the idea of Joseph's coat, put it on or show it off.*
- There was already tension in the family, but Jacob re-enforced this "us versus them" mentality by giving Joseph a custom-made coat! Imagine if your parents bought your little brother Air Jordans, and made you wear knock-offs. Jacob's gift spurred a lot of jealousy and made an even bigger mess.
 - Don't we all want to be a part of a family or friend group in which there is unconditional love? We want to be accepted for who we are — free from all prejudice, biases, and favoritism. But Jacob didn't do that. He allowed his personal preferences to

impact how he loved his children.

- Many believe Jacob preferred Joseph simply because he liked Joseph's birth mother better than the mother of his other children. Maybe you've even experienced this in your own life — being treated unfairly simply because of who you came from.
- Whatever the reason, Joseph's dad created an unhealthy family dynamic. But to be honest, Joseph didn't help the situation. Let's see how Joseph added to the unhealthiness.

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 37:1-11

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 37:1-11.*
- In Joseph's dreams, God revealed some important things. But ouch! Joseph kind of just flexed on his brothers!
 - It's true God was speaking to Joseph through his dreams. It's true God showed Joseph his future — that one day he *would* be in a position of authority over his brothers. But that's not really the point.
 - The problem wasn't that Joseph had these dreams in the first place — it was the way Joseph bragged about his prophetic dreams. The way he shared his dreams with his brothers lacked love.

SCRIPTURE | I Corinthians 13:1-7

- We sort-of defined love a few minutes ago, but let's see if we can define it a little more clearly with the help of some Scripture. In the New Testament of the Bible, a long time after Joseph and his brothers lived, a guy named Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in a city called Corinth. In that letter, he gave us a definition of what love is.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read I Corinthians 13:1-7.*
- Joseph was like a clanging cymbal to his brothers. Yeah, he could see the future, but without love, this dream meant nothing to his brothers. In fact, they grew to hate Joseph.
- As we'll see over the next few weeks, Joseph's lack of love in this moment set off a painful chain of events. Ultimately, we'll see how over two decades of heartache could have been avoided if Joseph had chosen to take a different approach toward his family.

ACTIVITY | Joseph: Take Two

- So what could Joseph had done differently? How could he have shown love to his brothers instead? How could he have been more . . .
 - Patient?
 - Kind?
 - Not boastful?
 - Not proud?
 - Not dishonoring to them?
 - Not self-seeking?
 - Protective of them?
- Let's imagine Joseph gets a redo on telling his dream to his brothers and let's write a new

script.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *On a whiteboard, write Joseph's words from the Genesis 37 passage. Then circle all of the times he said "I" or "me." Together, try rewriting Joseph's words in a way that would communicate the same message in a more loving way. As you go, erase or cross out Joseph's words and add your own. Try changing "I" and "me" language to "us" and "we," and add some humility!*
- Given the fact that there was already division between his brothers, Joseph needed more love in his words to break down the wall of hostility.

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

- Jacob's favoritism had created an imbalance in their family by showing favoritism to Joseph.
 - His brothers were filled with hatred for Joseph and the injustice of their father's favoritism.
 - Joseph was arrogant and insensitive to the ways his brothers were hurting.
- In this family, there was a lot of hurt. As we've said, when people get hurt, they usually want justice — but what is justice?
 - Justice is when something is just, fair, lawful, or right.
 - But "justice" can't be the same thing as "revenge." If everyone in Joseph's family who had been hurt tried to take revenge on each other, it would never end!
 - Their family didn't need more vengeance. They needed more love — but not the kind of love that's only communicated with words. They needed love communicated through actions, like Paul described in I Corinthians. Because justice isn't revenge.
Justice is love in action.

NOW WHAT?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **In Joseph's family, who hurt who and how?**
 - * **In your own words, what is love? What is justice?**
 - * **What do you think love and justice have to do with each other?**

LOVE IN ACTION

- You may not have eleven brothers who hate you like Joseph did, but I know you know what it's like to hurt and be hurt by others. Too often, it's easier to act unjustly than it is to act with love . . .
 - **IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS:** In what ways do you need to choose love instead of revenge? Humility instead of pride? Kindness and gentleness instead of cruelty? Are

you, like Joseph, creating conflict with others because of your lack of love?

- **IN YOUR COMMUNITY:** In what ways can you show love in your school, neighborhood, or community? Even if you didn't cause the problem, how can you put love into action and help solve it? Is there a conflict where you can help restore peace? Is there a need you can help meet?
- **IN THE WORLD:** In Joseph's family, his father Jacob's favoritism and brokenness caused conflict and division between Joseph and his brothers. When you look at the world around you, do you see conflict and division there too?

VIDEO | A Clip from Martin Luther King Jr.'s Speech, "I Have a Dream"

- Throughout history there have been leaders who had dreams for the world that were rooted in God's justice and love — especially when hatred and division have been common.
 - In the United States, the 1950s and 1960s saw a historic movement that fought against racial injustice. In that time, many voices rose up to address the racial divisions in America and call for love and justice.
 - Probably the most famous of these voices was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was a pastor who had a God-given dream and knew how to share it in love — not in a way that wasn't arrogant or self-serving.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (1:55-3:20) of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*

REFLECTION | What's Your Dream?

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream inspired others to fight for justice by turning their love for others into action. So what's your dream? Where do you want to see more love and less hatred?
- You don't have to wait for God to speak to you in your sleep. You can start dreaming now! What if you . . .
 - Wrote a kind note to someone you don't always agree with?
 - Try to find common ground with someone who seems different than you?
 - Go grocery shopping for an elderly person in your neighborhood, or someone who has a difficult time getting out of the house on their own?
 - Offer to tutor a child of a single parent who's struggling to maintain balance?
 - Doing something kind for a sibling — just because?
- **What is your dream? And what can you do to make it a reality?**
- In Joseph's story, God gave him a miraculous prophetic dream.
 - Although Joseph selfishly mishandled that dream, the message of that dream was rooted in love and justice — Joseph just missed it.
 - In the next few weeks, we'll discover more about what Joseph's dream meant. But for now, keep asking this question: "If **justice is love in action**, how can my actions demonstrate more of God's love?"

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **Re-read I Corinthians 13:1-7. Using the key words in this passage, in what ways do you sometimes struggle to show love at home? In your friendships? To people you don't know?**
 - **What obstacles might you face when trying to love those people with your actions?**
 - **This week, where do you want to put more love into action: at home, in your friendships, or in the world? How will you do that?**