

BRYAN STEVENSON JUST MERCY Study/Discussion Guide

1. **Just Mercy** begins with information about Bryan Stevenson growing up poor in a racially segregated community in Delaware. He remembers his grandmother telling him, “You can't understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close.” How does Stevenson get close to the incarcerated people he is helping? How does getting close to Walter McMillian affect Stevenson's life. Can you be an effective criminal lawyer, teacher, priest or caring person trying to help someone without getting close?
2. As a result of his extensive work with low income and incarcerated people, Stevenson concludes that “the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice.” What does this statement mean? What examples in the movie inform Stevenson's position on poverty and justice? What is justice? What does 'Just Mercy' mean?
3. Stevenson describes numerous workarounds within the United States legal system. We learn that nearly every prisoner on death row had been tried by an all-white or nearly all-white jury despite a Supreme Court ruling in the 19th century that declared excluding black people from jury duty unconstitutional. Why do you think black people are excluded from juries of black defendants? What factors should influence jury selection?
4. Many United States citizens will find this movie painful to watch, demoralizing and even shameful. What kind(s) of emotional state(s) did the movie bring up in you? Is this a movie about combating racism? What is this movie about?
5. Bearing in mind Stevenson's assertion that each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done, what role should mercy play in the way we respond to those who have committed crimes?
6. What is it about stories of individual suffering that makes it hard for us to turn away? Do you respond with more compassion to individual stories than you do to information about injustice in the entire system? Why is that?
7. Is it morally right that those on the margins need those in the mainstream to champion their causes in order to be treated fairly?
8. What spiritual lessons do you draw from the author's tenacity in the face of what many might find overwhelming? How could this relate to the Prayer of Good Courage?
9. What in your faith demands that you respond to what you now know?

After watching *Just Mercy* you may want to invite a group to watch [Stevenson's TED Talk](#) and engage in a conversation around its content

THIS GUIDE WAS ADAPTED FROM THE CENTER OF RACIAL HEALING.