

08. God Is Just and Merciful

Small Group Lesson

Jesus brought hope to an unfair world. We all have sinned—we have Adam and Eve to thank for that. Their actions brought sin into the world. But through Jesus, we have the opportunity to be freed from the penalty of sin—separation from God. Jesus' mercy doesn't make his justice obsolete—by his Spirit, we can live in the tension between the righteousness of God and the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God.

Lesson Objectives

1. **WHAT:** Justice reveals God's heart for right living, while mercy reveals God's heart for compassion and grace.
2. **WHY:** Teenagers who see the importance of trusting God to be just and merciful in their lives can experience a deeper devotion to Jesus.
3. **HOW:** Students will explore how justice and mercy are both character traits of God, and how Jesus is where justice and mercy meet.

Primary Scripture: John 3:16-21

Secondary Scriptures: Exodus 34:5-7

Jesus brought hope to an unfair world. We all have sinned. We have Adam and Eve to thank for that; their actions brought sin into the world. But through Jesus, we have the opportunity to be freed from the penalty of sin—which is separation from God. Jesus' mercy doesn't make his justice obsolete—by his Spirit, we can live in the tension between the righteousness of God and the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God.

1. Justice reveals God's heart for right living

Most of us don't like rules, but why are some rules helpful and necessary?

If you could change one rule—any rule—what would you change, and why?

What would life look like if there were no rules?

What rule are you most thankful for?

In what area of your life are you most concerned about following the rules? Why?

How do you define justice?

Describe a time you stood up for what was right—what happened?

Every person is born into sin. Since sin came into the world, we have to deal with good and evil, right and wrong—every day. The penalty for sin is death. Under the Old Covenant, people were required to make animal sacrifices to God as a redemptive offering for their sins. But under the New Covenant, Jesus' redemptive offering replaces that Old Testament requirement, and gives us a new way of living. God still wants to us to follow his commands and live according to his truths. But we can follow that path while pursuing the loving, compassionate, merciful way Jesus lived.

2. Mercy reveals God's heart for compassion and grace

How do you define mercy?

Do you always feel good when someone else is shown mercy? Why or why not?

Describe a time when someone showed you mercy, even though you didn't deserve it. How did you feel?

When should a person not be "eligible" for God's mercy, if ever? Explain.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: God's mercy is fueled by compassion and grace. When you read through the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—you see Jesus constantly offering mercy to the outcasts, the sick, and the needy. Jesus welcomed them because they mattered to him—just like you and I matter to him. God sets the standard for true love by sending Jesus to pay the price for sin, making it possible for us to be in relationship with God again. True love is selfless—thinking of the best for others. It involves self-sacrifice and enables you to put your own needs on hold while reaching out to others.

3. Jesus is where justice and mercy meet

How do you decide who deserves justice, and who deserves mercy?

How does Jesus uphold the importance of justice—a desire for right living?

How does Jesus show his mercy—true, love-filled compassion in action?

In the Bible, when do you see Jesus living in the tension between justice and mercy?

Which is harder for you to offer others: justice or mercy? Explain.

Jesus willingly came to earth—he was fully human and fully God—to live a sin-free life and die for our sins. God’s plan was to uphold justice and offer mercy at the same time, by making Jesus the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. But it didn’t end there. Jesus came back to life after his crucifixion. He overcame death, and he invites us to a new life with him—to believe in him, place our trust in him, and intentionally follow him. When we make that decision, we place our current plans and future destiny in his hands. When we center our life on Jesus, we can pursue right living while also experiencing and sharing his mercy.

BGroup Questions

1. How do you show God’s mercy to others at school? at home? in your neighborhood?
2. In what ways have you already lived in justice by standing up for what is right? What happened?
3. How do God’s justice and mercy work together? Think about an unfair situation in your life right now—what would it look like for you to live in the tension between justice and mercy in this situation?
4. Based on what we’ve discussed today, what do you know is true about the heart of Jesus?

TAKE ACTION: Memorize this Scripture this week! “*God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him*” (John 3:17).

**Leaders, leave 3-5 minutes for prayer at the end of your group time.