



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

One Step / Week 1

SERIES OVERVIEW

SERIES SUMMARY

A 4-week series about God's heart for justice.

SERIES BOTTOM LINE

Moving toward a better tomorrow.

WEEKLY BOTTOM LINES

WEEK 1: Where can you move toward justice?

WEEK 2: You don't have to face injustice alone.

WEEK 3: God loves justice.

WEEK 4: Keep moving toward justice.

SCRIPTURE

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:27 NLT).

NOTES FOR THIS WEEK

THINK ABOUT THIS

As you dive into leading a conversation about justice in this series, be mindful of the different backgrounds, perspectives, and circumstances represented in your group. While many of your middle schoolers may already know about, recognize, or even be experiencing a need for justice in the world, others may be seeing it in a new way or even for the first time. Consider your context as you lead this conversation. Be sensitive to what your students recognize and understand, what they've already experienced, and what they're learning when it comes to both justice and injustice. Keep the conversation inclusive and open to all your students, no matter where they're coming from on the topic. But, at the same time, be mindful to keep the conversation from turning into an unhealthy or unhelpful debate. The goal this week isn't to argue, offend, or debate on what is or isn't a need for justice. Rather, it's to help students see the need for justice around them in a new way and to find the courage to take even one step toward meeting that need. Finally, keep in mind that you likely have students living in real injustice every single day. Be careful to choose examples that don't make them feel singled out or embarrassed because of what they've experienced.

NOTE TO THE COMMUNICATOR

NOTE 1

This week's talk has language that focuses heavily on seeing and looking for ways we can move toward justice. Be sensitive to students in your ministry who are visually impaired, and consider having a conversation with them ahead of time to explain your talk's verbiage and context.

NOTE 2

During this week's large group talk, notice and acknowledge the varying degrees of experiences your students have had or are currently having with injustice. Keep in mind that the language you use will vary greatly depending on your audience. The way you talk about injustice with students who have experienced a great deal of inequality or unfair treatment will be different from how you talk to those who are starting to see and notice injustice in a new way or for the first time.

NOTE 3

During group time this week, students will anonymously write down feelings they've experienced as a direct result of facing injustice. Be sure to gather students' responses from your small group leaders before next week's large group time, as you'll be sharing some of their examples during your message.

INTERACTIVE 1: NOT FAIR

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll use the story of how the Houston Astros allegedly cheated to win the World Series to help students think about and recognize injustice.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A metal trash can
- A baseball bat
- A digital photo of the Houston Astros winning the 2017 World Series
- A way to display the photo for everyone to see

TEACHING OUTLINE

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:34-40 NIV).

INTRODUCTION

- We're starting a new series called *One Step* that has the potential to change the way we see ourselves, others, and the role we play in this world.
- People who run marathons have to train, stay strong, and be brave enough to keep going.
- Like marathon runners, working to see justice in the world takes a lot of strength, endurance, and courage.
- Justice requires us to take one step at a time to move toward a better tomorrow.

TENSION

- Justice means something is right, fair, or equal, and injustice means something is unfair, unequal, or not right.
- Working toward justice means taking action to make the world better for everyone.

- For some of us, the conversation about justice isn't new because we've experienced it, and it's deeply embedded in the world around us.
- For others, we may recognize things in the world that are unjust, but we may need to look at them in a different way.
- When things we've seen or experienced make us feel bad, it's a sign that it's not right.
- *[Interactive: Not Fair – Use the story of how the Houston Astros allegedly cheated to win the World Series to help students think about and recognize injustice.]*
- If you were any other player on any other team, watching the Astros cheat to win the World Series would probably feel like a big injustice.
- While we don't know how it feels to lose the World Series, we do know what it feels like . . .
 - To lose the highest grade in our math class to the kid who cheated.
 - To not be able to participate in extracurriculars because our parent lost their job.
 - To see the homeless population in our community growing.
 - To see war breaking out in different parts of the world.
 - To be treated differently because of race, ability, or looks.
- The feelings you experience in response to these things are signals that you recognize injustice.
- What if you, as a middle schooler, have the potential to do something about the hurts, wrongs, and unfair things in the world?

TRUTH

- Much of Jesus' ministry was about helping people see the world through His eyes and notice things they hadn't noticed before.
- Jesus talked to His listeners about seeing and caring about the injustices in the world.
- He said: *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'" (Matthew 25:34-39 NIV)*
- Since the wrongs Jesus talked about didn't happen directly to Him, His followers didn't understand that responding to those wrongs was an important way of showing their love for Jesus.
- Jesus explained: *"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Matthew 25:40 NIV).*
- Righteous people see, care about, and fight for the least of these—those who need the most help, feel the most pain, and get the worst treatment.
- We all want to help right the wrongs we see in the world. We want things to be fair, good, and equal, and so does God.
- Working toward justice starts with one question: Where can you move toward justice?
- We can follow Jesus' lead and open our eyes and hearts to the wrongs for what they are: injustice.

APPLICATION

- Moving toward justice looks different for each of us, but we can take one of these steps:
 1. Small Step: Take a small step toward justice, like opening your eyes to injustices for the first time or in a new way, recognizing the variety of injustices in the world, or learning about other people's experiences.
 2. Next Step: Consider what injustices you're witnessing or experiencing and think about what steps you can take to move toward justice in those areas.
 3. Big Step: Actually take a step toward a better tomorrow for the people who need it.
- I believe that your generation can take enough steps together to move toward justice.
- Where can you move toward justice?

LANDING

- Your small group is one of the best places you can start talking about moving toward justice.
- In your group, you can listen, ask questions, encourage each other, and share your experiences.
- As you head to group, think about this: What's one step you can take to move toward justice?

TEACHING SLIDES

All bolded words and phrases in the Teaching Script are also provided as teaching slides for Premium Tier subscribers.



TEACHING SCRIPT

One Step / Week 1

BOTTOM LINE

WHERE CAN YOU MOVE TOWARD JUSTICE?

INTRODUCTION

1 MINUTE

Hi everybody! I'm _____, and I'm really excited to kick off this new series with you. It's called *One Step*, and I think it has the potential to change the way we see ourselves, others, and the role we play in this world.

Before we get into it, I want to ask a question: Do you know somebody who's run a marathon? *[Pause to give students time to answer.]* I don't know about you, but to me, running a full 26.2 miles doesn't sound all that fun. Honestly, even *walking* 26.2 miles doesn't sound that great.

If you know somebody who has done it, then you probably know how much work they put into getting there. You can't just show up on race day with no training, no plan, and no endurance to run the race. Well, I guess you *can*, but you probably shouldn't! To successfully run a race like that, you have to prepare. You have to train, you have to stay strong, and you have to be brave enough to keep going. Because that's how marathons are run: by putting one foot in front of the other, over, and over, and over, and over again, one step at a time.

While we aren't training for a marathon together over the next four weeks, we are going to talk about another part of our lives that takes a lot of strength, a lot of endurance, and a lot of courage. It's something that requires us to take one step at a time to move toward a better tomorrow.

And that is the work to see justice in this world.

TENSION

3 MINUTES

Now, before we go any further, let's make sure we're all on the same page. When you hear that word, "justice," what comes to mind? Turn and tell somebody around you! *[Give students a chance to share.]*

Justice means something is right, fair, or equal. When we talk about justice, we're talking about moving toward a world where things are better for everyone. We're talking about working against **injustice, which is when things are unfair, unequal, or not right in the world.**

Now for some of us, the conversation about justice and injustice isn't new. Injustice is something some of us have experienced, whether it's related to race, disability, neurodiversity, based on what you have or don't have, and maybe something else altogether. Injustice and the need for justice is something that's a big part of the world around us. Something many of us have experienced for a long time, and it's something that's a big part of the world around us. I know some of you here have experienced it. Maybe you've experienced injustice, and I hate that you've had to go through that. I know it's not easy. I hope that this conversation will help us all work alongside each other to do our part to take one step toward a better tomorrow.

But for others of you, this may be a different way of seeing things. Of course, you recognize things in this world can be unfair, wrong, or difficult. And when you see or even experience things like that, you probably feel pretty awful, right?

The sinking feeling in your stomach . . .
The anger that makes you tighten your fists . . .
The frustration that leaves you feeling defeated . . .

Those are all signs something you've seen or experienced isn't right.

Let me show you what I mean.

INTERACTIVE: Not Fair

This is where you'll use the story of how the Houston Astros allegedly cheated to win the World Series to help students think about and recognize injustice. (Communicator Note: Be mindful of your context. Though this is a real-world scenario, be sure not to make it about any one person involved. Instead, leverage the real-life situation as a way that helps students connect to the feelings we get when we see injustice.)

In 2017, the Houston Astros won the World Series. [Show an image of the Astros winning the 2017 World Series.] Pretty big deal, right? Well, a few years later, that excitement died down. That's when the league figured out the team had been cheating the entire season leading up to their win. With cameras set up in center field, the team would watch what signal the opposing team's catcher sent to the pitcher. They were watching to figure out what pitches were about to be thrown. When they saw the signs, the players in the dugout would bang in code on a trash can to tell their player at bat what was coming his way.¹

A fastball... one hit. [Bang the trash can once.]
A change-up... two hits. [Bang the trash can twice.]
A curveball... three hits. [Bang the trash can three times.]

I don't know about you, but if I was any other player on any other team in the league that year, watching the Astros win the World Series by cheating would feel like a pretty big injustice.

(Communicator Note: If you're in a context with a lot of Astros fans, make sure to mention that they won the World Series without any controversy just a few years later!)

While you don't know what it feels like to lose the World Series because the other team cheated, you probably do know what it feels like to lose the highest grade in your math class to the kid who always cheated on their tests.

Or to have to give up your after-school sports or activities because your family can't afford them now that your parent lost their job.

Or to see the unhoused population in your community growing.

Or to see war breaking out in different parts of the world.

Or to be treated differently because of something like race, or ability, or the way you look.

¹ <https://www.si.com/mlb/2020/02/19/rob-manfred-astros-2017-trash-can-incident>

Those feelings you experience in response to this stuff? Those are all signals that you recognize injustice happening to you or around you. They're all signals calling somebody, *anybody*, to take one step toward justice.

Well, what if I told you that somebody could be you? That right now, **as a middle schooler, you have the potential to do something about the hurts, wrongs, and unfair things you see or experience in the world around you?** That you can take the first step toward a better tomorrow today?

TRUTH

4 MINUTES

Here's the good news: We aren't the first people to need a little help opening our eyes to the need for justice in the world. I think that's part of the reason Jesus made a habit of pointing out things that people hadn't seen or noticed before. So much of His ministry on Earth was about helping people see the world through His eyes. And today, we're going to look at a time He did just that.

A guy named **Matthew** actually experienced life with Jesus. Matthew knew Jesus and wrote down a lot of what he saw Him say and do. So, when we read his account of Jesus' life, it's from somebody who experienced it firsthand.

In this particular encounter, Jesus was trying to help those who were listening understand that part of following Him means seeing and caring about the injustices in the world. To do that, Jesus compared righteous people to unrighteous people. Now, when we talk about **righteous people**, we're talking about **people who do good and want to help others**. But unrighteous people? They do the opposite.

With that in mind, look at what Jesus said:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ (Matthew 25:34-39 NIV)

Okay, so maybe you're thinking what the people who were listening back then thought.

What in the world was Jesus talking about here?

Look at how Jesus answered:

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’ (Matthew 25:40 NIV).

Did you catch that? Jesus was saying that righteous people see and look for ways to fight for justice around them. They care about the least of these, which are those who need the most help, feel the most pain, or get the worst treatment. They recognize when someone is hungry, in prison, sick, or left out. They see the injustice in the way those people are treated, and they care. Why? Because in caring for those who are being treated as less than or left out, they're showing they care about what God cares about. They're showing they love the people God loves.

Jesus was reminding us that His followers are called to look for people who need the most help, feel the most pain, or get the worst treatment. Whether you're a follower of Jesus or still trying to figure out this whole faith thing, I think this is important for all of us. Because we all want a better tomorrow, right? We all want the wrongs we see to be made right. We want things to be fair, good, and equal. We want justice, and God wants that, too. And it starts with just one step. Or, in our case, one question:

Where can you move toward justice?

The truth is there's injustice happening around us all the time. I know for many of you, that injustice is even happening to you. No matter what our circumstances, we're all in the position to take one step toward justice, both for ourselves and for the people around us. And that first step may simply be following Jesus' lead to open our eyes and see the wrongs for what they are: injustice.

APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

So, where can you move toward justice?

The answer will be different for each of us, and that's okay! To start, I want to give you a few steps you can take to move toward justice right now.

Small Step: Maybe today, you need to start by taking just one small step in the direction of justice. For you, that might mean **opening your eyes to see the injustices around you for the first time or in a new way.** Your first move may be to recognize the variety of wrongs in the world—and not just the ones you've seen up close or know about already. Be curious to learn about other people's experiences. Pay attention to the way you feel when you see or experience things that are unfair or wrong. Don't turn your head or close your eyes. Instead, ask God to give you eyes to see and hearts to face the reality that there may be more injustice happening in your world than you even realized.

Next Step: Others of you may be ready to take your next step toward justice by speaking up or stepping in. Take time this week to **consider what injustices you're witnessing or experiencing and come up with a few next steps you can take to help move toward justice in those areas.** If you're seeing injustice, it might be time to lean into Jesus' call to His followers and speak up or step in to help. When you recognize a wrong, what's one thing you can do right now to help make it right? Do you need to speak up or step in? And if you're experiencing injustice, maybe your next step is to tell somebody. Ask for help. If you can, put a voice to what you're experiencing so that it can potentially be stopped.

Big Step: Finally, let me encourage those of you who are ready to take a big step toward justice. **Think about the practical things you know you can do to move toward justice.**

- What is that thing that breaks your heart because it's not right, unfair, or unequal?
- Who is that person you need to have a conversation with?
- What is your big step? And what do you need to do to take it?

Challenge yourself to do it! To take a big step toward a better tomorrow for the people who need it. Maybe even for yourself!

No, I'm not asking you to come up with a solution that will end things like poverty, racism, or war forever. But I do believe that you—this incredible community of middle schoolers—could take enough steps together to move toward justice. So, I'm encouraging us all to consider our one step this week by asking this question:

Where can you move toward justice?

LANDING

1 MINUTE

One of the best places you can start talking about how you can move toward justice is in your small group. We've created these groups to be a safe space for you to listen, ask questions, and encourage each other to do something great in this world . . . together. If you're experiencing injustice, working for justice, or just seeing the variety of injustices in the world in a new way, I hope you'll share more about that with your group today.

When you head to group, I want you to think about this question: **What's one step you can take to move toward justice?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
