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**Title:** Just Mercy: When Courage is Uncomfortable

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**Text:** [Luke 15:1-7](#)

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We don't like being uncomfortable. After a long day, we like to come home and put on comfortable clothes. We think of a big meal that reminds us of growing up as comfort food. When we want to get a good night's sleep, we want to sleep in a comfortable bed. No one says I want to put on some uncomfortable clothes. No one says I

want to eat some food that might make me more anxious or stressed. And no one says, that was an uncomfortable night of sleep, I can't wait to do it again.

We like to be comfortable

It's why it can be difficult for us to be courageous with our faith because being courageous often makes uncomfortable and when given the choice, we rather be comfortable.

Yet, our faithfulness is not rooted in our comfort, rather our faithfulness is rooted in our ability to become uncomfortable for God, to do God's will.

We are continuing a series I'm calling Just Mercy, where we are using stories from the Gospel of Luke and scenes from the book and movie Just Mercy, looking at how we may be vessels of God's mercy and compassion in the world.

Jesus tells us a parable about a lost sheep. It's one lost sheep out of 100 lost sheep. Jesus knows where 99 percent of the sheep are, they are found.

Think about that, 99 percent, that would seem to be pretty good.

Consider this, Peyton Manning is considered one of the all-time great quarterbacks in NFL history and his career completion percentage is 65 percent

Reggie Miller is considered one of the best three-point shooters in NBA history. He made 40 percent of his three-point shots in his career.

Jesus indicates that in the eyes of God, neither of those numbers is very good. In fact, to God, even 99 percent is not a good number when it comes to the number that God loves and that God desires to experience the fullness of life.

Jesus also tells us that often having courage in our faith means becoming uncomfortable. It can be uncomfortable to proclaim that even the missing one is deserving of God's love and grace and mercy.

It wasn't all that popular with some when Jesus proclaimed this truth about God. To Jesus, it should be clear what is God's will.

A group of Pharisees and legal scholars approach Jesus. They are bitter, bitter because Pharisees questioning Jesus are bitter because they feel like God is not good enough to them and too good to others whom they believe are undeserving of God's mercy and grace. They are concerned that Jesus was eating and meeting with tax collectors and sinners

They desperately desire mercy and grace for themselves, but they are hesitant to extend it to others. So, Jesus tells them a parable, a story

*"Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost sheep.' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives." (Luke 15:4-7)*

I told you that 99 percent is not good enough for Jesus. Jesus will always have concern for those who are lost, those who are marginalized by unjust systems, those peoples whom the world says don't matter.

God will go to great lengths to find each and every person.

Jesus is clear about the character of God, the courage of God. In God's economy, everyone is worthy of being found, of having the fullness of life, of being brought home. That's not up for debate.

He wants to know about me and you and humanity. It's why he asks the Pharisees the question, not about God but about us. "Suppose one of you" The ball is in our court.

We know what God will do, but what about us? What about you?

It can be uncomfortable to go after that one sheep, to use our voice and our hands and our feet on behalf of that one sheep. It may even be easier for us to feel really good about the 99 who have been saved, who have found liberation. 99 who know God's mercy.

It's interesting isn't it, when we hear this story Jesus tells, where we place ourselves. I suspect we are most often in the 99. How many times are we the one? How many times are we the one who needs to be found? Are we the one in need?

I love what Bryan Stevenson writes at the beginning of his book *Just Mercy* when he talks about an important lesson, he learned early on, saying

"Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done...We are all implicated when we allow other people to be mistreated. An absence of compassion can corrupt the decency of a community, a state, a nation."

Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine and search for the lost one until you found it?

We must have the courage to do just this because this is the character and will of God, this is what God is like and we are to be vessels of God's mercy and compassion, this is what we must be like as well.

The movie *Just Mercy* is based upon the book by Bryan Stevenson, which carries the same name. Stevenson is the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative and he has dedicated his life's work to helping the poor, the incarcerated, and the condemned. If any among us knows what it means to go after the one, the one out of a hundred, it's Bryan Stevenson.

The movie centers around the case of Walter McMillian, who was convicted and sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. Stevenson worked tirelessly on behalf of a man that society had forgotten, working to prove his innocence, working as McMillian says, "to get his truth back." McMillian spent 6 years on death row before Stevenson, through his tireless effort, convinced the state that McMillian was innocent and got the State to drop all charges and release McMillian.

There is a powerful story told by Shane Claiborne around the filming of the movie. He was invited on set one day to watch the filming. People playing correctional officers, prison guards, and death row inmates. After filming an intense scene, it was time for lunch and as people gathered for lunch, Shane

Claiborne says he saw the image of the world that Bryan Stevenson is building. prison guards and death row inmates laughing and talking together over lunch. It was a world in which each of us is more than the worst things we've done. Where if we have the courage, we can see past the costumes we wear and get to know each other as children of God.

Friends, we know the Character of God. We know what God is like because Jesus shows us what God is like.

So how might life be different? How might the world be different if those who follow Jesus don't settle for 99 percent when it comes to being vessels of mercy and compassion?

We will find out, if and when, we find the courage to be uncomfortable.

**Will you pray with me?**