

# Voices: Justice looks and sounds like ‘just us’

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*EDITOR’S NOTE: “Justice looks like ...” is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer’s understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.*

*You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudgment. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.*

*[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full “Justice looks like...” series.*

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The word and act of seeking justice are synonymous with issues surrounding racial inequity, police brutality, mass incarceration and protests plaguing society.

As a Black woman working in a predominately white Christian space during an era of racial unrest, it is an exhaustive effort to unpack the meaning of justice, what it is and what it should look like for my community.

When [Bryan Stevenson](#), the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, attempted to answer a question about what justice is, he responded, “A constant struggle.” In that response alone, the word justice sounds weighty, heavy with angst about what to do and how to do it.

Moreover, the utterance of the word “justice” illustrates a personal battle

about what is right and wrong. To ease the weight the term justice emits, I propose simplifying the concept and its meaning to two words: Just us.

## **Sounding out the word**

Before talking about where justice fits in the context of life, let us start by developing a basic understanding and familiarity with the word itself.

For a brief time as a child, I had a speech therapist assist me with learning to spell and read. I practiced pronouncing each word, then visualizing its context, before adopting the full nature of its meaning.

My teacher repeatedly would say, “Just sound it out.”

Initially, the thought of pronouncing a term I didn’t fully comprehend frightened me. But after hearing the word spoken aloud, silently mumbling the word, then breaking it up into two or three parts, I could visualize it better, becoming comfortable and confident in my ability to say and understand the word.

Following that childhood practice, when I sound out the word “justice,” then say it aloud a few times, I find myself morphing its syllables into a rhythmic chant: “Just us.”

Most recently, I attended my first rally for justice, with a beautiful sea of people from all walks of life melodiously chanting, “No justice, no peace.”

Again, at that moment, the words “just us” rang loud and clear. Justice is about us—“just us.” Admittedly, while the outcry felt empowering and freeing in this solemn climate, I was struck by the overt connotation of the word “justice.” The wordplay caught my attention.

# Sounding out the heart

At the heart of justice is relationship—a mutual concern for others.

Justice is not just an act, an end or destination, but a deep feeling, a virtue, a visceral need to connect one to another in relationship, ensuring we all are safe and protected.

I grew up in a family of four siblings. We are so close in age that my mother and father did not permit us to attend events or frolic outside without each other nearby. My parents continuously would say, “It’s just us; you have to stick together.” That sentiment signaled the pressing need for us to take care of one another.

Underpinning the duties of justice is the collective effort by the people to unite behind the elemental meaning of the word—a genuine concern for others.

In the Bible, it is no coincidence that the house of Justus was a place where both the Jews and Gentiles could meet to hear Paul preach the word of Jesus Christ (Acts 18:7).

# Sounding out the personal

Fundamentally for me, justice begins with assessing personal feelings about righting wrongs for those within our immediate and extended communities.

In the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, there was an urgent call for justice during 60 days of protests. Simultaneously, there was a deafening [silence](#) on the part of justice, particularly from Christian communities who admittedly struggle to find ways to engage in conversation around the topic.

I would attribute the conflicting behaviors to a lack of understanding about the essence of the word “justice.” Notwithstanding the complexities and nuance rooted in our quest for justice, consider my chant, “just us,” as a way to see the humanity in the word.

Justice is purely about us—people standing in the gaps for one another. The late great legal scholar and activist, Derrick Bell, reminded us that, as Christians, our call is to embrace, not exclude.

“We exist only in relation to our friends, family, life partners, co-workers, neighbors, strangers, even in relation to forces we cannot fully conceive of, let alone define. We are our relationships,” Bell said.

Understanding the concept of justice through a much simpler lens of “just us” in relationships with one another is the first step to what the Lord requires of us in Micah 6:8, to act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with God.

## **Sounding out the command**

Justice is such a big word, often over-conceptualized by people who have benefited from imperfect systems struggling to uphold it. It is easier to enter into a dialogue about justice that results in action toward a more just community when we can simplify its meaning to the relational element of the word.

As we continue the conversation, let us start with a unified understanding that the meaning of justice lies within the word itself. It is just us working together on this arduous journey toward a fair and equitable society.

Be encouraged that justice is just about us here on earth fulfilling God’s greatest commandments: “To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest

commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

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