

Verifiable

One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed (Deuteronomy 19:15).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 19:15-21

Song: “And Can It Be”

Rick loved building schools in Uganda. However, as a supervisor on the jobsite, he ran into tricky situations. Two workers once risked their jobs to get word to Rick that the builder was buying supplies rather than paying his employees. Rick decided to take action by verifying this information with both the builder and the brave workers. Rick, with frustration and a sense of justice, found the strength to confront the builder, who agreed to pay the workers.

God gave the Israelites a system of using witnesses, a system that would prevent fraud when settling disputes. The process of verification through reliable witnesses brought a unified agreement with all involved. It was important to follow God’s statutes consistently because applying God’s divine law places a strong border of protection on peoples’ rights.

We may encounter questionable situations. Exploring accusations in full with more than one reliable witness may be required. God cares about each one of us and provides principles to follow for guidance through tricky social situations—to result in fairness for everyone.

Father, thank You for giving us guidance through Your Word to live in equitable ways, which will point others to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 January 17–23. **Julia Taves** lives in Colorado with her husband. She teaches and has served as principal of an international school in Uganda, Africa.

Secret Sin Revealed

“Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20).

Scripture: Matthew 18:15-20

Song: “Whiter than Snow”

We all make mistakes, but this was no small thing. A professing Christian had secretly embezzled funds from investors in the church body. Eventually the whole thing was uncovered and brought out into the light. With no confession after confronting the offender some of the victims gathered to pray and then went to the offender in hopes of his restoration. God was in their midst as the brother listened and repented, realizing that only by God’s grace could he be forgiven.

God’s promise for believers who gather together in pursuit of correcting a wayward brother is clear. The intention of these directives is for cleansing and unity in the body of Christ. When God is in our midst, His righteousness prevails and we can pray in confidence with others for the Holy Spirit to intervene in the hearts and minds of those going through the discipline.

We are privileged to gather, pray, seek truth, trust, and forgive. When believers meet together in Jesus’ name, He is in our midst. We get to see a powerful God do amazing things we could never imagine. We can be joyful knowing that Jesus died in our place and paid the price for our sin so all of us can receive forgiveness and reconciliation.

Father, thank You for the Holy Spirit’s intervention and Jesus’ sacrifice to cleanse us. We know—and want—the power that comes from You as we pray together with others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

One More Time

Peter . . . asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21).

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

Song: “His Mercy Is More”

Charlie bounced up and down as his tail wagged excitedly. Josh was late getting home for the third day in a row, but Charlie didn't seem to notice. Josh's face was a slobbery mess when Charlie finally settled down. Josh thought, *I don't deserve all this love from Charlie. He must be hungry and tired from being cooped up in his kennel all day. Yet he seems to forget about any injustice the minute he sees me. It's like he has “injustice amnesia.”*

Peter came to Jesus concerning offenses and forgiveness. Jesus explained through a parable, directing Peter (and us) to forgive without keeping track. Since Jesus paid our debt in full, our sins are forgiven and the accounts are forgotten. He does not deal with us in the way we deserve (Romans 5:8). His mercy to forgive our sin is unending. In understanding what Jesus did for us, we should do for others likewise.

Forgiveness and love of others involves compassion, especially when an injustice has taken place or something is owed. When we choose to show mercy and forgive as Jesus does, every account of wrong is forgotten. Having that kind of “amnesia” may cause you to bounce up and down with joy, like Charlie!

Father, thank You for Your forgiveness and mercy as You paid my debt once and for all. Help me show others this love daily. In Jesus' name, amen.

Help Wanted

“You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (Exodus 18:18).

Scripture: Exodus 18:13-26

Song: “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus”

Being the principal of an international school was both rewarding and exhausting. Giving a listening ear to a child telling about a playground experience, to a parent worried about his child’s spiritual well-being, or to a teacher’s concern about a student’s progress consumed each day. I needed more hours in the day for the pile of work that sat untouched. Seeing my dilemma, a colleague asked, “How can I help?” Those four words brought relief.

Moses sat as judge with a line of people waiting to bring their troubles. When Moses took his father-in-law’s advice to select other capable men to help, things improved. None of them knew all the answers, but they would be representatives to direct the people to God—as He is the ultimate authority and judge. This lightened Moses’ load and allowed others to come alongside and serve also.

Like Moses, we can get overwhelmed when trying to lead or counsel others on our own. Even though we are capable, it is good to ask for help. God calls us to delegate the work to able believers who trust Him as the ultimate source in giving wisdom. Allowing others to come alongside gives them encouragement and lightens our load. It’s a win-win scenario.

Father, thank You for giving wisdom and the help of believers when leading others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Useful Voice

Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body (Ephesians 4:25).

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Song: “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say”

The year was 1960; the place was Mississippi in an all-white school. At age 6, Ruby Bridges, a young African American, passed the exam to attend William Frantz Elementary School. Racist remarks came from the riled-up crowd as she was escorted by federal marshals into the school. Ruby remained calm, keeping her eyes forward. It would become common for her to speak a prayer when coming and going, asking God to forgive the people who said bad things. Eventually, all races sat in the classroom together.

Paul encourages believers to live a life of unity with our neighbors. This involves proclaiming truth and encouragement, both to edify others and so they can see God’s goodness. At the end of the day, slander, bias, and bitterness should not have any place in the life of a believer. Just as Christ showed compassion and forgiveness, so believers are to choose these actions also.

We can be inspired when we see examples of people such as Ruby Bridges, who exemplified Paul’s affirmation to be kind—even in the face of slanderous words. Jesus himself also spoke about God’s truth and forgiveness while being slandered on the cross (Luke 23:34). Every new day is an opportunity for us to speak what is helpful to all God’s children.

Father, help us to speak out of love and kindness to all our neighbors, so they will see Your goodness and hear Your voice of truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Loving Others

You are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:19).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:14-22

Song: “Amazing Grace”

A plethora of refugees come flooding in day and night—all kinds of backgrounds, races, and beliefs looking for similar hope. Stories of abandonment are heard as each one coming into a strange land is looking for a way to survive. Shelah and Jade see this daily as they facilitate Refuge and Hope, which is a non-government organization in Africa assisting refugees with adjustment into their new lives. The work is not done out of duty, but out of love for God. They want to bring this grace and hope to others daily.

God speaks in Deuteronomy about the heart of the Israelites being so genuine in relationship with Him that it spills out onto people who are refugees, or foreigners. The Israelites, who were once aliens themselves in Egypt, were not to show partiality or pride in the way they treated outsiders.

We can be encouraged to serve God and others wholeheartedly, no matter where they come from or their backgrounds. It is great to know we have a mighty God who shows no partiality. After all, we were lost and alone without God, yet He showed us grace and acceptance. What wonders we may see when we hold fast to serving God and others with a humble and sincere heart of gratitude for what God did for us!

Father, You are awesome and mighty, full of grace! May we love others wholeheartedly and sincerely, remembering the great things You have done. In Jesus' name, amen.

Just Judges

Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly (Deuteronomy 16:18).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 17:8-13

Song: “Light of Every Nation”

On a virtual TV show, random people were asked, “How does the US government work?” Many were clueless. America has a unique, equitable governing system including three branches.

The legislative branch makes the laws, the executive branch enforces the laws, and the judicial branch interprets the laws. The judicial branch is best known for the Supreme Court. Serving for life as a Supreme Court judge in the highest court of the land is honorable. Each judge is expected to be of utmost integrity, not perverting justice.

Moses set up officials and a justice system with judges for the people of Israel. The judges were given responsibility to treat everyone in fairness. They were to be wise men who deserved respect. Just like today, impartial justice strengthens a system. The people of Israel were to honor the court system set up and abide by the judges’ decisions to live together rightly and peacefully in the land God gave to them.

We may not always agree with government officials, but God ultimately has placed these leaders over us. We should pray for our officials and judges, and be respectful to act according to the laws set up. Our future is established in God alone who will light the way for justice.

Father, we pray for our leaders to judge wisely and honor You as the God of all justice. In Jesus’ name, amen.