

# Character Matters: Justice

*Taking responsibility to uphold what is pure, right, and true*

## It Matters at Home

“I’ve just got to suffer through the ‘terrible two’s’ stage.”

“I told him not to get out of bed, but he’s playing so sweetly on the floor that I won’t spoil the moment.”

“I know this toy is your birthday present, but if you don’t let her have it she’ll never stop screaming - so hand it over.”

“I don’t have time to return that gum he stole to the store.”

Have you been guilty of any of these - or similar - statements? In my many years of participating with families in the care of their children, I have heard them all - and said or thought some of them! All four of these thoughts or statements reveal a mindset that is, at its root, unjust.

The responsibility of a child’s moral upbringing is a huge weight to carry. Unfortunately, many parents do not fully sense the burden of that weight. They do not realize that it is in the little decisions - often made when the children are quite small - that their “bent” toward justice or injustice will be determined.

For example, if young children sense that it is ok with you for them to disobey, as long as it does not inconvenience you, they will grow into adults who are willing to “bend the rules” whenever they think they can get away with it. If they see that making amends for wrongs they have done is unimportant to you,



they will grow up feeling they can do anything with no fear of retribution. If they realize that you hold them to low expectations because of their age or other factors, they will always find excuses for their misbehavior. If you discipline inconsistently, in anger and a spirit of revenge, they will never know what it means to repent of wrongdoing and be truly restored.

On the other hand, I have worked with families who understood how essential the concept of justice was to their children’s character. As a consequence, they have required consistent obedience of their children, whether or not their rebellion was, at that moment, an inconvenience. They have gone to great trouble to ensure that their children made proper restitution for

- ◆ Hold to a firm belief in moral absolutes
- ◆ Take action when you see wrong-doing
- ◆ Use proper methods to achieve just goals
- ◆ Demand right behavior of yourself
- ◆ Wisely correct those under your authority

any wrongs done to another - even if it would have been easier to overlook. They have chosen to administer wise, loving correction that fits the crime and seeks restoration - rather than erratic outbursts of anger.

As a result, their children are growing into happy, well-adjusted young people, with a firm belief in right and wrong, a desire to do right, and an awareness of the necessity of defending the right and opposing the wrong.

Justice matters - because today’s two-year-olds are tomorrow’s adults.

# It Matters on the Job

Who decides what is just and right? Is it a personal decision? Is it the decision of the lawmakers, or the courts? Is it the corporate determination of society as a whole? Or does right - justice - transcend the opinions of people entirely?

If we wish to have any semblance of stability in our world, we must certainly hope that morality is fixed and absolute, going beyond human determination. If it is not, it can change with all the fickleness we humans are prone to. Would any of us be willing to admit that the atrocities of Nazi Germany were right, because the society of that time and place deemed it to be so? Would we be comfortable saying that slavery is good and just, since many cultures at many times have practiced it without any apparent shame? Of course not!

We must agree, then, that right and wrong are unchanging standards that we are responsible to know



and uphold to the best of our ability. But what does this mean in the realm of our work?

First, it means that the Employee's Manual is not the final authority on what is right or wrong for you to do on the job. True justice does not look for loopholes in the rules. It follows the "spirit of the law" as well as its letter. Second, it means that we must appropriately confront the wrongdoing of others, but not for personal gain or to "get them in trouble," but instead with a desire to restore the offender and the offended to a good relationship. Finally, it means that you must be willing to be unpopular in order stand for the right. As long as there are people in your workplace, you will not be able to create a perfectly just environment, but you must do your part to be just yourself, and to encourage others to do right as well, no matter the cost.

Justice matters - because right and wrong is not something we mold to fit our preference.

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## Justice in Literature: *Atticus Finch*



*Gregory Peck in the unforgettable courtroom scene from the 1962 film.*

Atticus Finch, the hero of Harper Lee's classic book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is a lawyer who is assigned to defend a black man who has been accused of raping a white woman in racist 1930's Alabama. The evidence in the case boils down to the

black man's word against the white girl's and her father's. The people of the town are astonished and none too pleased to discover that Atticus "aims to defend him" - that is, to do his utmost to have the man acquitted.

Because of his firm stance against the injustice of the racially prejudiced system of the day, Atticus and his family are ostracized, insulted, and threatened by

many townspeople. Even those who agree with him are mostly silent, allowing Atticus to bear the brunt of the burden alone. As his neighbor says toward the end of the book, "We trust him to do right."

Can your neighbors and friends make that statement about you? Can they trust you to do right - no matter the cost, in spite of popular opinion - simply because it is right?

Justice is taking personal responsibility in our everyday lives to do right ourselves, defend those who suffer under wrongdoing, and to administer wise correction to any wrongdoers under our authority.

Justice matters - because the world hinges on the decisions of ordinary people.

