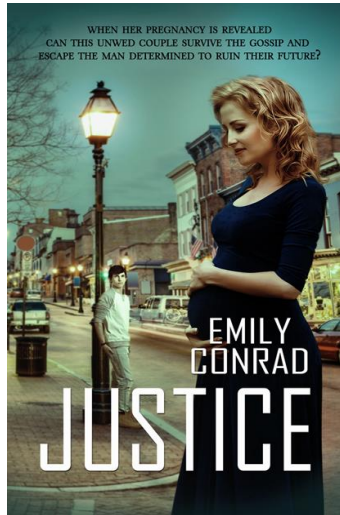


Discussion Questions



Also Available in Paperback:

JUSTICE

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ISBN (e): [9781522300465](#)

ISBN (tp): 9781522300762

Imprint: White Rose Publishing

Publisher: [Pelican Book Group](#)

Pages: 312

eBook SRP: 4.99

About the Book

Jake thought he was meant to marry Brooklyn, but now she's pregnant, and he had nothing to do with it.

As Brooklyn wrestles with questions about what her pregnancy means and how it will affect her relationship with Jake, she can't bring herself to tell him the truth.

To make matters worse, if the man who owns the bookstore across from Jake's coffee shop, has anything to do with it, the baby will ruin them both.

Can Jake and Brooklyn overcome the obstacles thrown in their path, and finally find the truth in God's love and in each other?

TITLE: Justice

Discussion:

Question 1: 1. Early on, Harold tells Jake to stop selling books. Do you think Jake was right to refuse? Why or why not?

Answer 1: Jake had a right to sell books in his shop, and if he'd removed them, Harold likely would've found another fight to pick. However, Jake comes to the conclusion later that he should've looked for a peaceful way to resolve the conflict with Harold, and removing the books might've been a way to accomplish that. In cases where there isn't a clear right and wrong, a personal relationship with Jesus is paramount. It's when Jake relies more on his desire to even the score than on God that he makes missteps that truly cost him.

Question 2: 2. Brooklyn didn't tell her closest friends or her family what had happened to her for months. What are the reasons you found it easy or hard to relate to this decision?

Answer 2: Some find it hard to believe a character whose friends are as loyal as Brooklyn's would remain silent. They wish she would speak up to clear her name, to further pursue her assailant through the justice system, to get help coping, or to preserve her relationship with Jake. Yet this element of the story is based on the truth that some women choose silence for a number of factors, such as guilt, shame, a longing to forget or move on, and/or a fear that no one will believe them. For this reason, it's important to respond to those who do reveal they've been assaulted with assurances of belief in what the victim is saying and in the victim's innocence.

Question 3: 3. What do you think it means to be above reproach? Were Jake and Brooklyn's interpretations of this goal healthy or harmful?

Answer 3: Jake's desire to be above reproach often leads him in a positive direction. Christians are called to live godly lives. Though a human can't ever live a perfect life, Christ enables his followers to become more and more like himself. Falling short should lead a believer to repentance and restoration. For someone in a position of leadership like Jake, living as an example is important and Biblical. The danger in putting too much stress on being above reproach is some things that people—even religious people—might reproach a believer for aren't sin. Similarly, people might excuse sin. This is why, though Christians are called to live holy lives, the Bible is clear that the goal must be to please God, not man. Brooklyn cites a desire to be above reproach when she suggests she and Jake shouldn't spend time in each other's apartments alone together. One of her concerns is how their relationship appears to others. Concern about people's opinions rather than the reality their relationship could lead to a kind of harmful legalism. But Brooklyn is more concerned about how to best live a pure, God-honoring life, and that allows the Holy Spirit to lead her. During their conversation about whether or not to go inside, Jake's main concern is Brooklyn. He believes they won't be criticized for being alone together and doesn't pause to ask what God wants them to do in their specific situation. Jake later recognizes this as a mistake. He tells Devin he should've been more sensitive, not to what would've appeared to be above reproach, but to the Spirit.

Question 4: 4. Jake and his mom discuss Matthew 10:16, in which Jesus instructs his followers to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Which character best succeeded at this?

Answer 4: Though different characters exhibited this in different ways throughout the novel, in the end Jake wisely recognizes the truth about the conflict with Harold, and his response leaves him as harmless or innocent as possible.

Question 5: 5. Do you feel that the church responded correctly when news of Brooklyn's pregnancy broke? Why or why not?

Answer 5: Pastor Simeon gave Jake and Brooklyn the options of a sabbatical or making the assault public knowledge. They could've instead asked for the couple's resignations or dealt with the situation the way Jake requested, which was to ask the congregation to give them the benefit of the doubt. Pastor Simeon's final decision allowed healing. Because Jake, especially, was in a leadership position, the appearance of sin needed to be addressed so the church community could understand and heal. Giving Brooklyn control of how the news spread restored a little of the control she lost during the assault. The pastor also made plans to reinstate Jake and followed up on those plans despite Jake switching to a new church. But instead of simply giving back the old position, Pastor Simeon took time to mentor and restore him. In this way, the church's response allowed for an ideal outcome.

Question 6: 6. Brooklyn is a perfectionist. In what ways does this affect her relationship with Jake? How does it affect her friendships with other women?

Answer 6: Brooklyn didn't allow her relationship with Jake to progress to a romance for years before the start of the novel because she compared her troubled childhood home life with what she considered to be Jake's ideal upbringing and concluded that the imperfections had damaged her. Once rape became part of her story, she fell even further short of her own vision for what the perfect woman should be like. Her belief that she wasn't good enough was so strong she had an easier time believing God wanted her to be alone than that the Lord would bless her with a healthy relationship with a good man. Believing she didn't deserve him, she spent years pulling back from a romance with Jake or moving forward only very hesitantly. Her perfectionism also makes it hard for her to develop healthy relationships with other women. As a perfectionist, she struggles with admitting her struggles and shortcomings. She looks down on herself for them, and fears other women will do the same until Elizabeth and Haley coax her into opening up.

Question 7: 7. When Caleb learns of the rape, he asks Jake, "If God is good, how did this happen to her?" What would you reply?

Answer 7: Some would argue that evil in the world is proof that God either doesn't exist or isn't good. The Bible and the characters in the novel have a different perspective. Jake's answer is that God doesn't owe humanity explanations, which lines up with the account of Job in the Bible as well as with Isaiah 45:9-10 and Romans 9:20-21. Along the same line of thought, the women of Closely Knit decide together that it's often impossible to tell why trials occur, but that our responsibility is to remain faithful to Jesus through it. Though they don't quote it, this lines up with 1 Peter 4:19. In the face of this question, however, Brooklyn struggles with believing that

she must've done something wrong to deserve the evil done to her. She eventually comes to believe that the assault wasn't a punishment but rather part of a bigger plan for good, along the lines of what Jesus says in John 9:3.

Question 8: 8. Early on, Jake half-jokingly tells Devin that they'll always have each other. In what ways is he right? Though Jake is Devin's mentor, in what ways does Devin help Jake?

Answer 8: Jake is there for Devin as a trusted advisor during the first and last parts of the book. But when Jake resigns his leadership position, he tries to distance himself from Devin. Because Devin doesn't allow this to happen, he becomes a key part of Jake's restoration. He seeks out Jake to confront him and later to simply reconnect with him. When Jake returns to their church, Devin is the first to take the seat next to him. When Jake retakes his role as mentor, it's with respect for the man Devin is becoming and for Devin's convictions about Lauren. His offer to Devin at the grand opening shows just how much Jake has come to trust him.

Question 9: 9. Jake and Brooklyn both seek to stop the damaging effects of others' actions. Their differing solutions cause a rift as Jake pursues justice while Brooklyn chooses forgiveness. How are justice and forgiveness at odds with each other? Are the two simultaneously possible?

Answer 9 As Jake's mom (and the Bible) says, God loves justice. Brooklyn correctly points out that Christians are called to forgive. Forgiveness and justice then should not be at odds with each other, but they often appear to be when humans pursue justice through their own means. This is where Jake went wrong. Instead of justice, he sought revenge. When Brooklyn reported the crime against her through the proper channels and focused on forgiveness rather than harboring harmful feelings against her rapist, she showed how the two could be simultaneously possible. She encourages Jake to do the same by reporting Harold's crimes and leaving the outcome to God.

Question 10: 10. Though the story is not about a virgin birth, certain elements of the novel were inspired by the account of Mary and Joseph. What similarities and differences did you notice?

Answer 10: The key difference between the account of Mary and Joseph and Jake and Brooklyn's story is a point that Caleb and Jake discuss early in the story: Brooklyn's baby is not a virgin birth, and her child is in no way divine. Jesus is divine, and his birth was a miraculous virgin birth. The sense of betrayal Jake feels when he finds out about Brooklyn's pregnancy but his unwillingness to react with harshness was based on Joseph's reaction to Mary. He also shares with Joseph a willingness to take on the role of father in the life of a baby that isn't his own flesh and blood despite the possible scandal. The Bible tells us that Joseph was a just man, and Jake certainly does seek a kind of justice throughout the novel, but it isn't until the end that he becomes a just man. Brooklyn struggles to process the crime that was committed against her and its consequences, but she comes to a place of acceptance and forgiveness relatively quickly, a kind of faith inspired by Mary, who immediately accepted God's plan for her despite the personal risk. The novel contains many other parallels with the record we have of Mary and Joseph's lives, but these inspirations for the main conflict and characters are central.

