



Once again, the headlines of the past week are filled with heavy, overwhelming stories of pain and tragedy. The events that happened during the clashes of opposing groups in Charlottesville have left much of the country reeling and wondering, how can this be happening in our country? How can this be happening anywhere? How can people be filled with so much hate just because someone is from a different background, has a different skin tone, or has a family history that comes from a different culture? How can people be angered to the point of hurting and killing others because they have different beliefs?

While these clashes strike most people here in the West with horror, similar clashes happen around the world far more frequently than any one of us would like to know about. Whether it's Arabs against Jews, Muslims against Christians, whites against blacks, or any other conflicts—when emotions rise and reason is left behind, violence erupts, and human suffering is the result.

It's easy to feel hopeless. It's easy to feel that there is nothing that can really be done to heal people's hearts and bring understanding and peace to groups who are filled with ignorance and hate. But God is bigger than our anger. God loves harder than we can ever imagine. And He can do all things—and He wants to use us.

Noted attorney and advocate for social justice Bryan Stevenson has said, “Hopelessness is the enemy of social justice. It is the enemy of effective leadership.” He has also said that there is “power in proximity”—that we have to get close to the problems and the suffering people in our lives to begin to understand one another and find solutions together. He also notes, “Effective leadership only happens when great leaders are willing to do uncomfortable things.”

It's uncomfortable to face up to our own ignorance and to years of systemic racism. But to be effective, and to be faithful, it's what we need to do today.

*As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the article. Then discuss in this way:*

**Is there a troubling issue or a person or a group of people that you have tried to distance yourself from? What are your reasons for doing that?**

**How could you work at getting closer to problems of social justice and to people who are suffering in your life? Who do you need to reach out to?**

**What is one uncomfortable thing you could do this week to be a leader of peace and hope? It could be as simple as sitting by someone who may be your “enemy,” saying you're sorry to someone you've hurt or offended, or just admitting to yourself areas in your life where you have pre-judged someone because of how they look or where they are from.**

**How do we respond at times when we feel overwhelmed by suffering or difficult problems? Today we'll look at three ways Job reacted when he felt hopeless in his suffering.**