

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Goodness in Gotham: Show Explores Good, Evil and Moral Compromise
By Paul Asay

What Happened:

On Sept. 22, the Fox network unveiled its much-anticipated show “Gotham,” a prequel to most of the Batman stories we’ve heard. In the program, Bruce Wayne is still a scared little kid, and the only real good guy in view is young detective James Gordon.

The Gotham City that Gordon knows is a dark, bleak place. Although some of Batman’s most famous villains—Penguin, Catwoman, the Riddler—are just beginning to explore their nasty natures, there’s still plenty of badness going down in Gotham’s mean streets.

Sometimes, the cops trying to clean up this dirty town aren’t much better than the criminals they fight. James’ own partner, Harvey Bullock, has been known to cut deals with underworld characters. “You seem like a nice guy,” he tells James early in the first episode. “This is not a city, or a job, for nice guys.”

However, James seems determined to prove him wrong. He wants to catch bad guys—on the streets and inside the police force itself. He seems disinclined to shoot people, unlike his more trigger-happy partner. He seeks to bring justice to a city that has precious little of it. He refuses to compromise his values, even in life-threatening situations. Also, he tries to mentor a young Bruce Wayne, trying to give him a little hope in the midst of tragedy.

“I know how you feel right now,” James tells Bruce right after Bruce’s parents have been killed. “I promise you, that no matter how dark and scary the world might be right now, there will be light.”

Talk About It

Gotham is a pretty bleak place (and a pretty bleak show), but it’s not so different from our own fallen world. Our schools and neighborhoods can have their own share of bad people and tricky, morally confusing situations. Sometimes, it can feel as if we have to compromise our values and integrity in order to get along, but if we follow James Gordon’s example, there’s a different way.

Have you ever felt pressured to compromise your values? What did you do? In retrospect, was it the right thing to do?

In “Gotham,” Bruce Wayne tells James Gordon he’s trying to conquer his fear. James tells him, “Fear doesn’t need conquering. Fear tells you where the edge is. Fear is a good thing.” Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Can you think of situations when being scared of something has helped you? Hurt by that fear?

When Harvey asks James to carry out a criminal’s dirty work, he compares their job to what happens in war. “Sometimes in war you got to do a bad thing to do good, right?” He says, “So do you do this bad thing?” Do you think Harvey’s right that sometimes it’s OK to do something bad for a greater good? Have you ever faced such a situation?

What the Bible Says:

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:22-2).

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:8).

“Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things” (Heb. 13:18).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Beliefnet.com* and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *PluggedIn* and wrote the Batman book *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He recently collaborated with Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, on his book *The Good Dad*. He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.