

Baseline Community Church: A Biblical framework for understanding God's heart for justice and righteousness.

Context: Leaning into and living out our vision

Our vision as a church is to grow disciples who authentically follow Jesus Christ so that our communities are transformed. We have been honored to live this out by helping to feed the homeless in Pomona, supporting Casa Esperanza in Ensenada, filling boxes for Operation Christmas Child, and participating in our annual "In His Steps" Sunday. Many individuals support ministries such as Compassion and World Vision which seek to come alongside the poor and oppressed children of the world. We've sought to participate in the mission of God in many different ways. And while there are many areas of our lives individually and corporately where God longs to do His deeper work, the events of this past year have shown us that there is still a divide in our country and our world around the issues of race and justice. As disciples of Jesus, we believe that the church is called to step into this divide and be an agent of transformation and reconciliation.

Anchoring Ourselves in Scripture

Many of us are struggling to sift through the wide array of voices in our culture right now in pursuit of truth. The need to be rooted in the teachings of scripture is ever so apparent. As a church, our desire is to better understand the Biblical foundation around the area of racial justice upon which all of us can stand together. We trust that God's Spirit will speak through His Word and do what He always does...to encourage us when we are in step with God's desires, to challenge us when our eyes are blind to his truth, and to lead us to repentance when we get in touch with our sin and brokenness.

God's Design: Unity, Diversity – Shalom

You might find yourself wondering, is this work of racial reconciliation and seeking to address social injustice really central to the gospel? The answer is yes and here's why. In the beginning, God created man and woman in His image with equal value, dignity, and worth (Genesis 1). All humans are created in God's image and our differences reflect the multifaceted nature of God. God's *shalom* rested on the earth. *Shalom* is that place of perfect peace, wholeness, unity, harmony. It represents perfect unity in diversity. Everything was as it should be according to God's intended design.

Sin: A Fallen World – A Broken People (*and the rest is history*)

Adam and Eve chose their own way over God's way and sin entered our world (Genesis 3). This was a disruption to God's *shalom* and the whole of creation was tainted by sin. Sin entered every human heart and infected every system here on earth. The good things that were in perfect harmony were suddenly out of sync, even at odds with each other. You don't have to read very far in the Biblical story to see how conflict, tension, and division rose to the surface due to sin's disruption. Instead of diversity being a part of God's *shalom* and design, it's been used as a means to divide, take advantage of, and marginalize different groups from one another. This has resulted in very different experiences for those impacted by injustice, inequality, and marginalization based on race, gender, disability, poverty, age, and geography. The pages of scripture tell a story about God working with broken people to restore His *shalom*, perfect peace.

The Good News: Redeemed for God’s Redemptive Work – Righteousness and Justice

Here’s what’s mind-boggling. God invites us—broken, sinful people—to actually *participate* in this process of restoring *shalom*. In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of this process as ushering in the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). But what does this look like practically? It always begins with Christ’s redemptive work in us; being restored to right relationship with Him; and then, guided by His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit to pursue righteousness and justice (Isaiah 1:17). This pair is so closely interwoven, you really can’t have one without the other. Righteousness develops as we submit to Christ; allowing Him to shape and mold our character into His likeness. In pursuing justice, our character formation is given a purpose in Christ: *for the sake of others*. In and through Christ, pursuing justice involves looking at the world, noticing what isn’t right, and working, by the power of the Spirit, to restore things *as they should be* according to God’s intended design.

Throughout the pages of scripture, God repeatedly makes this call to justice very practical. He calls His people to take a stand and speak up on behalf of the most oppressed members of society. God both invites and directs His people to go above and beyond to have compassion and seek justice on behalf of the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and the poor (Deuteronomy 14:29; Zechariah 7:9-10; James 1:27). In the language of today, these individuals could be described as facing systemic injustice. That is, their very identity left them outside of the “systems” that existed to protect those living in Israel. Because these groups of people were not protected by society, God took it upon himself to make sure they were looked after and cared for. Not only that, but God chose to use His people to be agents of reconciliation and administer justice in the world.

This call to actively pursue justice and stand in solidarity with the marginalized is a *major* theme in the bible. This invitation was given:

- To the people of Israel in the Law (Leviticus 19:15-16; Deuteronomy 16:20)
- In the message of the prophets (Micah 6:8; Amos 5:24; Isaiah 58)
- In the life and teachings of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19; Mark 11:15-17)
- In the letters to the New Testament churches (Ephesians 2:14-16; 1 John 3:16-18; Acts 2:44-45).

And the story is not over. We desire and commit to finding our place in it. At times the Church has been an uncompromising missional force for good. However, history is clear that the Church has also been silent, even complicit with forces and structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality. God’s invitation and direction still stand. The world is clearly not “as it should be.” This is why we must rise up as people of justice.

Leaning into Learning

It’s one thing to read scripture and understand it at a cognitive level, but it is a different endeavor to actually *live it out*. Some of us feel ready to enter the world of racial justice but we feel like we aren’t sure how. Others of us feel more hesitant about stepping into conversations about race. It may feel uncomfortable, unknown, or risky. You might feel like you are still piecing together a biblical foundation for racial reconciliation. No matter where we fall along this continuum, God beckons us to bring our questions to Him in prayer. And no matter where we are at on our respective journeys, we believe God calls us to engage with and learn from Him and each other, affirming that the work of reconciliation is for all of us and, consistent with our Mission Statement, central to our discipleship with Jesus.

What It Means for Us

According to Jesus, getting in touch with our most broken and hidden parts is *the* pathway to experiencing freedom, wholeness, and true transformation. For decades, Baseline has sought to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. God is far from finished with us, and there are many areas where He longs to do His deeper work in us so He can do Kingdom work through us. It's in this context, that we've come to recognize that we have blind spots in this specific area of racial injustice. We think it's important for us as your leaders to recognize both our silence at times and our missteps at others; acknowledging our need to thoughtfully and actively respond. Thanks to the grace of Jesus, we see in scripture that God never burdens His children with shame when we're honest about our shortcomings. In fact, it's just the opposite!

The Invitation: Emphasis – Grace and truth – Staying at the table

As the church leadership team, this is the journey we are inviting you into. Would you consider being open, in a new way, to the transformational power of the gospel? We know that pursuing racial reconciliation, fighting against injustice, and standing in solidarity with the oppressed are not always easy tasks. But we also know that God's Spirit goes before us, fills us with His power, and will be our guide as we prayerfully seek His direction.

For some of you, a brief letter might not feel like enough. You might find yourself saying, "Yes and amen...but what are we actually going to *do*?" We totally get that. And we will get there. We still stand by our working framework of growth when it comes to racial justice: *Listen, Learn, Lament, Labor*, and ultimately to love. We feel that it is critical for us as the church leadership team to acknowledge our shortcomings in this area, making it clear that we are taking our cues from scripture alone.

We are currently working to develop an action plan for moving forward and our desire is for this development process to be as broad, inclusive and as prayer-informed as possible. That action plan will be the "part two" to this letter. Although we are still in process, we felt strongly that we share what God has placed on our hearts by way of direction and invitation with you. In the meantime, we invite you to join us in these specific ways:

Pray: Prayer is fundamentally an act of offering ourselves to God. Both individually and collectively as a church, we're asking the Lord for genuine openness to learn and grow in Him in these areas, difficult though they may be. We ask Him for help to cultivate and maintain a humble learning posture recognizing that "this is the place and time where God is instructing us."

Seek Him in His Word: We're committing to engaging key scriptural truths in these areas so that the Word of the Lord, does the work of the Lord, by the Spirit of the Lord. While the phrase "Voices of Baseline" has emerged as a working title for our efforts so far, we acknowledge the most important "Voice" we seek, is the Lord's. In full and equal measure, we desire to deepen our understanding of His uncompromising truth and His unconditional grace.

Engage with Each Other: Stay at the table where sustained conversations can happen together, sharing perspectives and being open to hearing other voices. For some, this may be a welcome invitation. For others, it may surface conflicted feelings or apprehension. But we trust the Spirit of God to be in these conversations as we seek "shalom" – unity in diversity. This is our opportunity to model this as the "Voices of Baseline."

Prayer Informed Action: Consider being part of a workgroup that along with the Pastoral Ministry Team and Church Leadership will help us develop actions and next steps that help us become more of who God intends for us to be. Some of this may also emerge out of Core, Prayer, or Bible Study groups as they meet. Actions may involve: increasing our own awareness, supporting each other in our respective journeys, building new relationships with others of diverse backgrounds, providing concrete support to individuals, families, and communities adversely impacted and marginalized by virtue of race, gender, ethnicity, disability, or age and/or supporting churches, organizations that do the same.

We have a lot to learn and are grateful to be on this journey with you. We welcome any and all thoughts and reflections.

Grace and peace,
Your Baseline Leadership Team

P.S. If you are curious about gaining a deeper biblical understanding of reconciliation, diversity, equity, and inclusion, we would recommend checking out this [position paper](#) from our denomination *Converge*.