

Many still see the gospel and justice as being mutually exclusive. Dr. Mason challenges this notion. He helps us to recognize that the gospel calls us to stand for justice. Not only does Dr. Mason push us toward the presence of God in lament, he also calls us to step into the presence and experiences of those impacted by racism.

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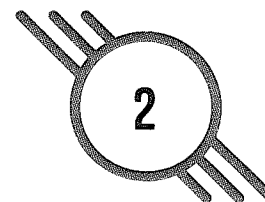
**E R I C M A S O N**

# **WOKE CHURCH**

**AN URGENT CALL FOR CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA  
TO CONFRONT RACISM AND INJUSTICE**

**MOODY PUBLISHERS**

CHICAGO



## HOW BIG IS THE GOSPEL? (JUSTICE AND THE GOSPEL)

I grew up in a Christian home. I was a church boy but not a Christian. At Brightwood Park United Methodist Church on the corner of 9th and Jefferson Streets in northwest Washington, D.C., I found a haven. The black church for me was a refuge from the crack-infested streets that riddled my neighborhood. It was one of the central places of help and aid for us. It was where I got a chance at my first public singing solo; my first opportunities to lead. I heard the liturgy and the songs of Zion and the Word preached, but I wasn't a believer. In this environment, however, I had the seeds of the gospel planted in me as well as the nurturing of my dignity as a human. I'm forever grateful for this.

After I graduated from Archbishop Carroll High School, I went to Bowie State University (one of the oldest historically black colleges in the country). While on the campus I began to learn

about my African heritage. I soon began to reject Christianity and became hostile toward the faith. I started drinking and smoking weed. But I always felt out of place—like there was some type of call pulling me and challenging me about my current condition. One day I decided to go to the campus ministry worship service with a young lady I was dating. While there, I heard the gospel of Jesus just as clear as I can see the words I'm writing now. I placed my confidence in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the resurrection as a propitiation for my sins.

For about nine months, I wrestled as an undisciplined, new believer. A young man from a theologically charismatic background began to disciple my roommate and me. As I began to grow, I started to shed things in my life that were sins and encumbrances (Heb. 12:1–3), and I began the discipline of fixing my eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of my faith. As I grew, it was clear to me that I was called to minister. During this time, I started courting my beautiful wife, Yvette. She took me to her home church, First Baptist Church of Highland Park in Landover, Maryland. There I heard the glorious gospel every Sunday under the leadership of Rev. Dr. James J. McCord.

The gospel that saved my soul in 1992 gave me a new heart—one that was knit together with Christ and knit together with my Christian brothers and sisters. It compels me to seek what is good and what is right for my fellow man.

#### WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians clarifies the essence of the gospel:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the

Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Cor. 15:3–6 NIV)

In his declaration of the gospel as “of first importance,” Paul is clarifying that these truths are central for salvation. He reiterates this crucial message to the believers at Colossae:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (Col. 1:21–23 NIV)

#### THE GOSPEL AND RECONCILIATION

This is the glorious gospel! We have been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus Christ. We rejoice in that truth. But in the gospel, man is not just reconciled to God by faith. Man is also reconciled to man by faith. (See 2 Cor. 5:18). God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. He doesn't give us the luxury of refusing to be reconciled. If God could pursue reconciliation with us—in spite of all of our sins, our rebellion, our issues—we should be rushing toward one another to reconcile.

I remember when God was challenging me about people that I needed to straighten things out with. And I didn't like it. It seemed like God challenged me: "I need you to go handle it." I'm honest with God without being disrespectful, so I said, "I'm not really feeling like working it out." God challenged me again with something like "I don't care what you feel like. So, until you move toward reconciliation, I'm going to lean on you. I'm going to lean up against your soul until you're uncomfortable." That's how you know you're a Christian. You know you're a Christian when God seems to say, "I'm going to put you into this terrifying submission hold." I'm not talking about in the flesh. I'm talking about in the spirit. When you get hit in the soul, it's ten times more terrifying than being hit in the flesh.

It was as if He put me into a headlock and began tightening His grip. And when I continued to resist, He was like, "Well, I'm going to tighten it up." What's funny is that you try to run, and your running just makes it worse. So you try to surf the web, try to go shopping, try to have fun. And you can't have fun because the Holy Ghost just will not let you go. And finally you surrender.

I remember trying to set up this reconciliation meeting. And I was frustrated with the whole situation. But I was pursuing and doing all that I needed to do on my end. I sensed God challenging me again: "When you go in there, it's not about other people. It's about you obeying Me. Don't worry about the response. You go in, and you obey Me." I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to be obedient." So I went in. I sought reconciliation. I wrestled and fought against my flesh. Reconciliation didn't happen. But the headlock ended because from God's perspective, I had done what He commanded me to do. I wasn't responsible for how the other person responded.

That's why the Bible says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18 NIV). There's no peace like God-sent peace. And this is what should mark us as

the people and the family of God. We are the sheepfold, the body, the new humanity, chosen race, new creation, the elect, exiles, royal priesthood, living stones, and temple of the living God! All of this speaks not of our individuality, but of our connectivity through Jesus' death by faith. Since this is true, we must pursue honest reconciliation that faces the issues of our broken past in this country. We must take time to revisit our history and proclaim the gospel to each season and seek reconciliation, restoration, and restitution, as it is appropriate.

This is the gospel mandate. And we dare not truncate it or reduce it to one of its parts. The danger of reductionism is that it attempts to focus on a single aspect to the neglect of others. That is not the goal of this book. The goal of this book is to shine a spotlight on one of the aspects of the gospel that has been neglected and dismissed as inappropriate for discourse.

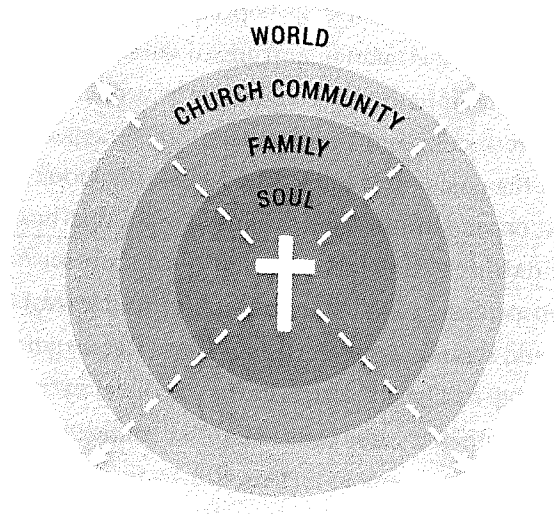
The gospel has far-reaching implications. I remember having to use several remotes for everything. There was a remote for the VCR, a remote for the TV, a remote for the cable, a remote for the DVD, and another one for the stereo. But someone had a smart idea. They took one remote and used it to program all of those receivers to respond to it. They called it the all-in-one. All-in-one meant that all your electronic devices could be activated by one remote that had it all. I believe that the gospel is an all-in-one remote for salvation and living the Christian life. We are saved by the gospel, and we live out the gospel in every facet of our lives.

The chart on the following page illustrates how the gospel is to saturate the life of the believer. It shows how a woke believer is to impact home, community, and, ultimately, the world for Christ.

Pastor Tony Evans describes the debate in Christian circles about how the gospel and justice should relate to one another.

There is some confusion today about the implications of the gospel, and to what degree the gospel includes this mandate of justice. Some Christians believe that to include social liberation and justice in the gospel is to preach a “different gospel.” Others believe that to exclude social liberation and justice as part of the gospel is to deny the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

### Gospel Saturation



### THE GOSPEL AND JUSTICE

When I think about the sinfulness of man, I’m keenly aware that it would have been just and fair for God to leave us eternally separated from Him (Rev. 20). Yet, God mercifully created a way to save me from being a violator of His just law (Gal. 3:13)! Jesus became my just representative and died under unjust circumstances (2 Cor. 5:21). God used the injustice of Rome and the Jews as a means for Jesus, the innocent, to take on my guilt and

legally pay for my sin (Luke 9:22). He paid for my sin by being my propitiation (1 John 2:2).

Although justification is a work of God’s grace (“[they] are justified freely by his grace,” v. 24), it is nevertheless not at the expense of his justice—understanding by justice God’s rectitude, that attribute by means of which he does all things justly and rightly. There is no conflict in our justification between God’s justice and his grace, since both meet at the cross of Christ. God provides the sacrifice (by grace) and Christ bears the penalty for our sins (satisfying God’s justice).<sup>2</sup>

We have to be careful about placing limitations on the attributes of God. In Western theology, we tend to lack a comprehensive view of God’s perfections, particularly righteousness/justice and even our understanding of justification. Justification is a huge greenhouse of truth that extends beyond “being declared righteous”! Justified isn’t merely a position, but a practice! Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us by faith leads to our being made right with God as well as our making things right on earth—knowing that Jesus will return and bring to completion the work that He has been doing through His people.

There are few words in any language that can equal *dikaiosis* for theological depth and resonance. It has been at the center of scholarly debate for centuries. Known largely as “justification,” it is still a key word in ecumenical discussion. Yet we have great difficulty in translating it into English. We need to absorb the teaching of Austin Farrer, who wrote, “God has no attitudes which are not actions; the two things are one.”<sup>3</sup>

In essence, we tend to have a one-dimensional understanding of justification. It is important to view the Romans 5–6 and the 2 Corinthians 5 sense of righteousness as both intrinsic and extrinsic. In other words, it is an attribute and an action. The following quote by Fleming Rutledge expands upon this idea:

When a reader of the Bible discovers that the verb translated “justify” and the nouns “justification,” “righteousness,” and “justice” are the same word, the effect on that reader’s understanding can be revolutionary. Ernst Käsemann opened up a new understanding of the term *dikaiosis*, traditionally translated “justification,” that continues to bear fruit into the twenty-first century. In his groundbreaking essay “The Righteousness of God in Paul,” he shows that God’s *dikaiosisyne* is not an attribute but a power, namely, “a power that brings salvation to pass.” Thus, “righteousness” does not mean moral perfection. It is not a distant, forbidding characteristic of God that humans are supposed to try to emulate or imitate; there is no good news in that. Instead, the righteousness of God is God’s powerful activity of making right what is wrong in the world. When we read, in both Old and New Testaments, that God is righteous, we are to understand that God is at work in his creation doing right. He is overcoming evil, delivering the oppressed, raising the poor from the dust, vindicating the voiceless victims who have had no one to defend them.<sup>4</sup>

The way we are taught about these aspects of the gospel deeply affects our understanding and the way we process justice. When we have a reductionist understanding of justification, we fail to see the holistic picture of the gospel. God’s righteousness is Him

making all things right. As disciples of Jesus, we are being made right and fighting with humility as we announce the kingdom. Again, as Paul writes in Titus 3:1–14, he shows both gospel ethics and gospel ethos. Regeneration is a motivation for good works. It is a fruit of gospel transformation. Paul calls God the Father a philanthropist (*Philanthropia*). In other words, His philanthropy is both transformative to the soul and expressed by His action upon us. He expects us to be active in good works for His glory as a response and proof that we have been transformed. As Jesus stated to His disciples in John 15:8: “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”

In light of this glorious truth, we are to proclaim the gospel to change people within systems. It is important for us not to disconnect the gospel from the Kingdom. In proclaiming the gospel, we are to proclaim the reality of an already and not yet kingdom. In Mark 1:14–15, we find Jesus doing just this. After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

J. Dwight Pentecost used to speak of the kingdom as being near: “the kingdom is within your grasp.” What Jesus did was show that the good news touches every area of life. Being transformed by the gospel means that we as the covenant community bring that newness of life wherever we go. Our desire should be for our kingdom activity to point to the need for the soul to be changed.

### THE BIBLE AND JUSTICE

It’s concerning to me when I take note of the themes that are emphasized as central to the Bible, and see that justice is rarely mentioned. We rightly believe that Jesus is central (John 5:37, Luke 24:27); the glory of God is central (Eph. 1); and the gospel is central

in all of its parts: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation (Rom. 1:20; 5:18-21; 10:9-13; 8:18-30). But I don't believe that we spend nearly as much time on justice as a major theme of the Bible.

*Neglect of Justice*

This is crucial because it has direct application to the issues of race and injustice in this country.

Jesus invites us to look at all of Scripture through the lens of justice. He tells the Pharisees that in all their work to understand Yahweh, they have missed this key element of justice.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, and yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others. (Matt. 23:23)

*yes! they neglected justice*

Jesus is talking to the scribes and the leaders because their role was to lead God's people toward the kingdom and to help them develop a heart for God and toward Jesus. But instead of doing that, they weighed them down with trivial requirements and squabbles that didn't help them see Jesus more clearly, nor did it help them be salt and light to the lost. The Lord Jesus calls justice a weighty matter in Scripture. Jesus is using a play on words by contrasting the naturally light weight of the mint, dill, and cumin with the weight and expanse of deeper matters of the law. According to R. T. France, "There is no suggestion that the scribes and Pharisees were opposed in principle to justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The problem was that they did not devote the same care to working out the practical implications of these basic principles as they did to the minutiae of tithing herbs."<sup>5</sup>

What minutiae are we engaging in to show our dedication to exegesis, historical theology, biblical theology, systematic theology, Old Testament, New Testament, Bible exposition, herme-

neutics, pastoral theology, etc. while we miss some of the key opportunities for fleshing out and communicating a commitment to the heart of God? What minutiae do we need to reprioritize in order that we might get to many of the core commitments that Jesus wants us to focus on in and through the church? I'm not suggesting that we neglect proper exegesis and hermeneutics, but that we must prioritize our call to serve the needs of justice. Let's turn the tide and become the beastly gospel community that God wants us to be as the Woke Church. Since the gospel has awakened us, we need to walk in that comprehensive awakening without neglecting all the other things that the Lord requires of us.

*yes*

#### JUSTICE AS A HUGE THEME IN THE BIBLE

I love the picture in Proverbs 31 of the queen mother who is teaching her son who would someday be king: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Prov. 31:8-9 NIV). It's interesting how this queen demonstrates wisdom as she delivers one of the greatest leadership lessons in history—to a soon-to-be monarch.

*great example*

So this mother is teaching a variety of lessons to this son. She says, "Son, you're going to be king one day."

He's probably ignoring her, because he's a prince now. He's ready to get his kingdom. He's been watching Pops and is probably already thinking, *Pops, move out of the way. I'm ready to wreck shop as king.*

But the queen mother acts as the character of his kingliness. And what she does is tell him several things. She says, "Son, when you get in power, the women who don't like you right now, they're gonna like you then. You're gonna have to fall back from them. I'm going to tell you a little later how to choose a wife because

with all that stuff coming at you, son, you're going to have to know how to pick a wife." Now, that's a good mother right there.

However, what's interesting is that neatly nestled in there is her advice on how to use his power. She starts talking to him about justice. This is so important because the natural tendency of one in leadership and privilege is not to use their privilege and their power on behalf of others. And so she tells him, "This is what you're going to have to do. There are going to be aristocrats and those who are in power that are going to try to influence your kingliness to use it for themselves. They'll try to make you denigrate those who don't have a voice. Therefore, I want you to look beyond the foolishness of those who are in the aristocratic positions, who try to keep everything for themselves and try to press down on people that don't have a voice and are not like them, press down on people that they can use to continue their legacy of privilege and wealth."

This mother challenges this would-be king with how he should respond in the face of injustice: "Open your mouth for the mute. For the rights of all who are destitute." She says something beautiful, particularly in the second verse, "Open your mouth. Judge righteously." Now what's interesting here is that this mother may not realize it, but she is a theologian. And she's using the two-sided coin of justice and righteousness. The same word (*tsedeq*, Hebrew; *dikaioi*, Greek) is used for justice and righteousness. Justice points to extrinsic execution of the heart of God, and righteousness means intrinsic impact by the heart of God.

You have to be intrinsically changed by God in order for justice to be done. In other words, justice doesn't come by legislation, because you can legislate things and nothing changes. We can go to the executive branch. We can go to the legislative branch. We can go to the judicial branch. We can put whatever kind of Supreme Court justices we want to put in place. But at the end of

the day legislation doesn't change hearts . . . only the gospel does.

Do we continue to press for legislation? Yes! Do we press for systemic change? Yes! Do we maximize the advantages of being born in America? Yes. We have some founding documents that have never been fulfilled. So we must continue to work together to hold America accountable for what it promised to do. But we understand that we have at our disposal something that is much greater than man-made documents. We have the glorious gospel!

Unfortunately, today justice seems to be seen as a "liberal" word, not a word that pervades the Scripture. Thankfully, many of us are waking up to the recognition that justice is a core message of the Bible. The Bible is filled with justice as a main theme. It shouts from the blood of righteous Abel to the establishment of the eternal Kingdom of God.

We will engage briefly the source and practice of justice for the church. Here are some passages on the matter throughout the Old Testament.

"You must not deny justice to a poor person among you in his lawsuit." (Ex. 23:6)

"Pursue justice and justice alone, so that you will live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you." (Deut. 16:20)

"Do not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to the poor or give preference to the rich; judge your neighbor fairly." (Lev. 19:15)

So David reigned over all Israel, administering justice and righteousness for all his people. (2 Sam. 8:15)

"Blessed be the LORD your God! He delighted in you and put you on the throne of Israel, because of the



LORD's eternal love for Israel. He has made you king to carry out justice and righteousness." (1 Kings 10:9)

The king consulted the wise men who understood the times, for it was his normal procedure to confer with experts in law and justice. (Est. 1:13)

He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the LORD's unfailing love. (Ps. 33:5)

But you must return to your God.  
Maintain love and justice,  
and always put your hope in God. (Hos. 12:6)

But let justice flow like water,  
and righteousness, like an unfailing stream. (Amos 5:24)

Because I have sinned against him,  
I must endure the Lord's rage  
until he champions my cause  
and establishes justice for me.  
He will bring me into the light;  
I will see his salvation. (Mic. 7:9)

He applies his justice morning by morning;  
he does not fail at dawn. (Zeph. 3:5)

There are countless other verses for future study: 1 Sam. 8:3; 1 Chron. 18:14; 2 Chron. 9:8; Job 36:6; Prov. 29:4; Eccl. 3:15; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 5:5; Lam. 3:35; Ezek. 34:16; Hab. 1:7. More than half of the books in the Old Testament speak of justice as an attribute of God and a responsibility of His people.

### JUSTICE IN GOD'S CHARACTER

We can't know God without understanding His heart for justice. From the beginning God revealed Himself as a just God. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, it was God's justice that required the first shedding of blood to provide a covering for their nakedness. It was His justice on display that sent them away from the garden forever with the promise of One who would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

The early church father Tertullian, in responding to people who suggested that his concern for justice meant that he was not being faithful to the gospel, said this:

from the very first the Creator was both good and also just. And both His attributes advanced together. His goodness created; His justice arranged, the world; and in this process it even then decreed that the world should be formed of good materials, because it took counsel with goodness. The work of justice is apparent, in the separation which was pronounced between light and darkness, between day and night, between heaven and earth, between the water above and the water beneath.<sup>6</sup>

Tertullian asserted that justice was on display in and through creation. God applied justice in how He separated one aspect of creation from the other.

The prophet Daniel declares that God is righteous or just when He punishes His people for their disobedience (Dan. 9:14). In saying this, Daniel is stressing the fact that God's character is just. He is a just God. He is the source of all true justice. Justice is sometimes taken together with the righteousness of God. The justice of God means that God is entirely correct and just in all His dealings with humanity; moreover, this justice acts in accor-

dance with His law. In other words, to say that God is just means that God isn't confused about what is right. Rightness is who He is at all times. This rightness makes its way to the home of every believer because His primary expectation is justice and rightness on the part of all that He has created—especially those who are in covenant with Him! God's covenant community is the purveyor of His character in all of life.

Seeing God in this way helps define and root justice in the Lord. To ignore justice is to ignore God. Justice isn't God (we don't worship justice), but His justice is one of His key attributes. This means that God's justice has practical connection to our everyday lives. We have the ability to experience it. We see God's justice personified in Jesus. He will return and restore justice, by judging the seen and unseen kings of the earth and those evil forces that motivated the wickedness of their kingdoms as well as rewarding the righteous for obeying the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 20–22).

We are called to share in God's justice as His image bearers. He expects justice to be exacted and for us to be His representatives of justice in this world. We will all be called into account for how we reflected His character in justice. How did we discipline our children? What was our work ethic? How did we treat employees? Did we speak out against injustice? Did we act justly?

#### JUSTICE AS THE CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH

Jesus' feeding the five thousand was about authentic care for the hunger of the crowd, but He also wanted to creatively engage their hunger in a way that transcended their need for physical food. Luke and John both show us that Jesus cared for the crowd, both physically and spiritually! He fed them (Luke 9:13–17); He preached the kingdom to them and did works that pointed to the eternal kingdom He would one day bring (v. 11); and He presented

Himself as the true bread of life (vv. 22–59). We are called to follow His example of caring for the physical needs of others in order that the gospel witness of the kingdom might saturate the earth.

What would it look like for the church to mirror Christ's pattern of meeting physical needs in order to have access to the hearts of men and women? The early church got it right. Acts 2 shares the story of how they gave themselves to the teaching of the apostles, and whenever they discovered that someone had a need, they would sell some of their possessions and distribute the proceeds to care for the need. And God responded by "[adding] to the church daily such as should be saved" (κτλ).

Doing inner-city work keeps my eyes open to the justice gaps daily. I see fatherlessness, violence literally on our front steps, educational challenges, gentrification, redlining, and the poor having very little access to healthy food options, which impact education and mortality. These realities could be daunting without all of the riches that heaven brings us through Jesus. I love to walk and ride my bike through the neighborhood of Epiphany and meet people. It's been good to see what's going on, share the gospel, and just dream of the kingdom coming to the neighborhood. As difficult as it is sometimes to witness the brokenness, I find hope in what only Jesus can do through the church.

As exiles in this world, we must see ourselves as incarnational missionaries in the world for justice. Shalom is the means for justice to be done. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9 NIV). Since we are children of God, we must be peacemakers. We can't be peacemakers and ignore injustice. Ignoring injustice isn't a sign of being an authentic believer. Particularly, ignoring systemic injustice. Even Israel in its exile in Babylon was called to be a kingdom people who sought the peace and prosperity of the city (Jer. 29:7). Although this is specific to the exile of Israel, Jesus and the apostles pick up the exilic theme

of our being strangers who are peacemakers. Consider this quote from Lois Barrett in *Missional Church*:

Shalom envisions the full prosperity of a people of God living under the covenant of God's demanding care and compassionate rule. In the prophetic vision, peace such as this comes hand in hand with justice. Without justice, there can be no real peace, and without peace, no real justice. Indeed, only in a social world full of a peace grounded in justice can there come the full expression of joy and celebration.<sup>7</sup>

God's shalom is God's divine work of re-stitching broken creation to His purpose and design. Timothy Keller defines the biblical concept of *shalom* as universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight: "God created the world to be a fabric, for everything to be woven together and interdependent."<sup>8</sup> I love this picture of the church as "woven together and interdependent." It suggests that we need one another. We can't image Christ to a watching world apart from each other.

The American philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff says:

Shalom is the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships with God, with self, with fellows, with nature. . . . But the peace which is shalom is not merely the absence of hostility, not merely being in right relationship. Shalom at its highest is enjoyment in one's relationships. . . . Shalom in the first place incorporates right, harmonious relationships to God and delight in service. . . . Secondly, shalom incorporates right harmonious relationships to other human beings and delight in human community. . . . thirdly, shalom

incorporates right, harmonious relationships to nature and delight in our physical surroundings. . . . Justice, the enjoyment of one's rights, is indispensable to shalom. [Therefore] justice is wounded when shalom is absent.<sup>9</sup>

As incarnational missionaries, our mission flows from the mission of the gospel of practicing peace. As the church, we are called to be peace practitioners. In the words of Darrell Guder, "By incarnational mission, I mean the understanding and practice of Christian witness that is rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus"—the gospel.<sup>10</sup> As we walk as a Holy Spirit community, we are empowered by His divine presence to fight for peace in multiple layers of society. Our witness depends on our commitment to showing off the glory of Jesus in how we work in the world to be agents of change. Being agents of change means speaking to its brokenness, but also having the skill to use the truth to serve in bringing solutions. We have the vision and strategic acumen of Joseph. The ability to see the problem and formulate viable solutions is our vocation.

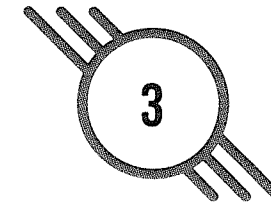
This reality may call on us to broaden our understanding of missional community. Those times on Wednesday and Thursday night, those are just missional community rallies. You're supposed to gather and then to scatter. Missional community is not just when you gather. You're still a missional community when you're in the city. That means when you go get your ramen noodles at Whole Foods or Trader Joe's. Whenever you're there, you're supposed to be opening up your life so God can give you common ground with people who are not like you. This is where we live out the gospel. The gospel is supposed to bring people together who wouldn't naturally be together. That's the nature of it.

I agree with Justin Martyr, the early Christian apologist: “We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies.”<sup>11</sup>

This is what the gospel does. It causes those who used to be enemies to now become friends.

We desperately need the gospel. I need the gospel. Every day I need Jesus’ gospel to shepherd my heart and mind. When I see all the bad news on my newsfeed on Facebook, if I’m not in my Bible, preaching the gospel to myself, looking at the eschatological hope, I will lose my mind. And so I’m glad that when we see the injustices and the brokenness of our society we have the tool of God’s Word to help us become change agents—to make a difference in our spheres of influence. The gospel is the truth that unites us. It is the common ground that knits our souls together as one.

How big is the gospel? I believe in a gospel that is big enough to root out indifference, apathy, ignorance, and poverty of soul. It’s big enough to change utterly lost men and women into bold champions of the faith. It’s big enough to wake a slumbering church from its sleep. It’s a gospel that cries out for a Woke Church.



## WE’RE FAMILY, WE’RE HOLY

I remember accepting my first pastoral position at Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. It is one of the oldest black churches in Houston. I can remember teaching the Wednesday noonday Bible study for the older saints. I was twenty-six years old, and they were all between 75 and 95 years of age. I had learned Hebrew, Greek, and was learning Aramaic. I was trying to teach them theology and all about the hypostatic union. I thought I was doing something. But you know what they did for me? They didn’t wrestle me down and tell me to stop being arrogant. They said, “Baby, you’re gonna have to break that down for us.” And here’s what they did. They cooked me bread pudding and real gumbo. When my wife was sick, they took care of us. We were far from home, and they invited us into their home for Thanksgiving. Over that period of time, the church was patient with me. They showed me what true family looks like.

Family loves on one another. Family takes care of one another. Family is patient with one another.