

Voices: Justice looks like making things right

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.

You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudice. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.

[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.

I have been blessed to be the father of four wonderful children: three sons—all preachers: Johnny, Joseph and Jordan; and one daughter, Lambreni.

Joseph and Jordan, the two youngest are four years apart. During their upbringing, it was not uncommon for Joseph—who my wife described as an instigator—to take advantage of Jordan.

Jordan often came to me to intervene. What he sought without knowing it was justice. He needed me to "make it right," not just to acknowledge the wrong, sympathize or pray. His entreaty was for me to use my authority and ability to "make it right."

That is what justice looks like to me—make it right.

Justice in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament over 200 times for justice is “*mishpat*.” It is an attribute of God.

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; mercy and truth go before your face” (Psalm 89:14).

Since justice is God’s nature, he requires it of his people. “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Mishpat has several meanings in the Old Testament. Tim Keller, in *Generous Justice* says: “Its most basic meaning is to treat people equitably. It means acquitting or punishing every person on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. ... It is punishing wrongdoing as well as giving people their rights, and it is giving people what they are due.”

Four-hundred-year absence of justice

Jordan’s youthful demand was symbolic of our times. In the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder in Minneapolis, the cry for justice came across our nation from Black people, white people, Latinx, Asians and Native Americans.

Demonstrations took place in over 30 cities, with signs that read: “Black Lives Matter,” “No Justice No Peace” and “Liberty and Justice for ALL,” demanding America to “make it right.”

The time has come for our nation to reckon with the denial of and lack of *mishpat* toward Black people, which commenced with the tenet of white supremacy that established a cruel, inhumane, yes, sinful enslavement of Blacks brought from Africa lasting 246 years.

When slavery ended, those freed were denied justice through a system of “neo-slavery” through the Black Codes, betrayal during Reconstruction, the KKK, lynching, Jim Crow, segregation and overt discrimination lasting another 89 years.

The next period witnessed the end of segregation and the monumental Civil Rights Movement with its Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act. This period of 68 years perpetuated injustice with increased poverty, failed public education, housing discrimination, redlining, racial profiling, police brutality, mass incarceration, an unjust criminal justice system, gerrymandering, pay day loan establishments, voter suppression, poor health care and the resurfacing of white supremacy. These periods total 403 years of justice denied.

What’s expected of the church

When my son came seeking justice, it would have been wrong for me to tell him, “Get over it,” or “I do not want to hear anything about this,” or “I have not done anything to you.” There can be no *mishpat* with indifference to suffering.

In Old Testament Israel, every city had a gate where decisions were made for the welfare of its inhabitants. These decisions were economic, relational and political. The overarching principal for all decisions was *mishpat*.

“Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate ...” (Amos 5:15).

The church of Jesus Christ should be the primary advocate for justice in America. Justice was a biblical concept before it became a political one. During this season of reflection and evaluation, the church can and should distinguish itself as modern-day gatekeepers for what the last phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance promises:—“liberty and justice for all.”

A plan leading to justice

To be gatekeepers for *mishpat*, it is essential that the Baptist General Convention of Texas, along with its White pastors and churches prioritize “making it right.” Develop a plan that leads to justice:

1. Hold a summit on justice and racial equality.
2. Listen to, learn from and love victims of injustice.
3. Preach on justice consistently—biblically, not politically.
4. Speak out against injustice whenever it occurs.
5. Partner with a Black church whose resources are substantially less than yours for kingdom expansion.
6. Partner with a public school whose student population is laden with poverty.
7. Practice justice throughout all organizations, establishing inclusion, diversity, equality, and equity as policy.
8. Pray for change.

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[Click here](#) to read the full “Justice looks like...” series.

Correction: “Desegregation” in 13th paragraph corrected to “segregation.”