



“There is no institution on earth more equipped or more capable of bringing transformation to the cause of reconciliation than the Church.”

– John M. Perkins

We believe God wants to use the church to bridge the gap between people of different ethnicities for His glory. We have certainly made progress, but there is still a gap between where we are and where Jesus wants us to be. In order to navigate this journey well, there are a few things we need to do. First, we need to embrace God’s vision for unity and reconciliation. Second, we need to listen well, weep with those who weep, and be open to believing people whose stories sound different than our own. Lastly, we need to keep the conversation going. This is a joyful and difficult journey, but it’s a journey that is divinely directed. So why don’t we travel it together?

Week 1 – “God’s Grand Vision”

Breakdown:

Since the beginning of creation God has had a grand vision for unity. Think about it. In the beginning He created humans in His image with inherent dignity, worth, and value. However, when the slimy serpent Satan entered the scene, he made it his mission to divide and destroy. With one bite of the forbidden fruit, sin entered the picture and our perfect unity collapsed.

Thankfully that wasn’t the end of the story. If we fast-forward thousands of years, we see the serpent *crusher*, Jesus, enter the scene. Towards the end of Jesus’ life, He spent a period of time praying and pleading for the things on His heart. The last thing He prayed for before being betrayed was that we, His people, would all be *one*. Jesus prayed that what collapsed in the garden would be rebuilt through the cross.

Unfortunately, if we look around it doesn’t take long to see that Jesus’ prayer isn’t fulfilled yet. But that’s *still* not the end of the story. If we fast-forward one more time, we see a glimpse of this grand vision realized! Revelation 7:9 says, “I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language...standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” How beautiful is that? God’s Grand Vision seen in Genesis 1

and John 17 perfectly fulfilled. This is where we are headed and this is our true hope for unbreakable unity and lasting reconciliation!

Bible: [Genesis 1:25-28 // John 17:20-23 // Revelation 7:9-10](#)

Week 2 – “Listen, Believe, Weep”

Breakdown:

In our fast-paced and digitally-driven culture, the art of listening has taken a hard hit. It is so easy to talk, type, and tweet without even having to engage someone who thinks differently than us. Sadly, this one-way communication can be a major roadblock to reconciliation.

In contrast, we have found that *listening well* is a crucial part of bridging the gap between people of different ethnicities. Listening when people’s experiences don’t match our own. Listening when people disagree with us. Listening even when it hurts. However, the process doesn’t stop there. This listening should then lead to empathy. As Christians who are called to be in unity, we must listen without suspicion, believe the best in each other, and put ourselves in other people’s shoes.

This means when we hear stories that break our hearts or challenge our views, instead of shrugging them off or becoming defensive, we are invited to weep and hurt alongside our brothers and sisters of a different color. A beautiful display of Christlike love. This is the sort of listening and empathy that changes the world and brings reconciliation. Why don’t we give it a shot and see what God does through our joyful obedience?

Bible: [James 1:19-20 // 1 Corinthians 13:7 // Romans 12:15](#)

Week 3 – Panel Conversation

Breakdown:

Over the past couple of weeks, you will have talked a lot about listening and building relationships with people who look and think differently than us. So for this week we want to practice what we preach. Instead of a sermon you will lead a panel discussion with a few leaders and students of color from your church.

You will ask questions like, “Why is racial reconciliation such an important topic for Christians to understand?” and “How can students combat the sin of racism at their schools?” This will be a great opportunity for your

students to hear from peers and mentors who have lived this, and have trusted Jesus through it. Look forward to see where this discussion goes and what God will do through it!

Bible: **James 1:22**



Introduction:

Welcome to [Insert your own youth group name], it’s so good to see all of you tonight. We are starting a brand new series called “Bridge the Gap” where we will be tackling the topic of racial reconciliation. Let me give you nine reasons why this topic is so important to talk about today. Clementa, Cynthia, Susie, Ethel, Depayne, Tywanza, Daniel, Sharonda, and Myra. These are the names of nine African American brothers and sisters in Christ who were murdered in cold blood at their church by white supremacist, Dylan Roof. Does anyone know what year this happened? 2015. Not even 5 years ago. This is the worst-case-scenario of what happens when racism is kindled and carried out. However, did you know racism is a lot closer to home than you think? Did you know racism doesn’t always look as obvious as the aforementioned tragedy?

[TEACHER NOTE: Use examples you have seen in your student ministry or in your state/city. Skip specific examples if constrained by time.]

Let me give you a few examples. Two of our biracial high school students have had to report racial insults to their schools this year. A mom of two adopted biracial students told me recently that people have posted pictures of her kids on their neighborhood Facebook page to figure out who they belonged to. Her neighbors were instantly suspicious and couldn’t comprehend that *these* kids could live in *this* affluent neighborhood. A black high school student we know very well doesn’t like attending youth group because some of the same students who say racist comments at school during the day come here to worship at night. She said she could barely handle them at school, so why would she want to come hang out with them for another two hours. Now that’s heartbreaking isn’t it?

For these reasons, and so many more, we must address and bridge the gap between where we are and where God wants us to be. With that said, before we dive in, I do want to challenge us. This subject can bring up a lot of emotions like defensiveness, anger, guilt, or even apathy. And while some of these responses are natural, they aren’t helpful or godly. I want to challenge us to humble ourselves, listen well, seek understanding, and align ourselves with God’s Word. Can we do that? Alright, good, then we are ready to dive in.

God’s Grand Vision - The Beginning:

For today I want to start with the strongest foundation I can think of concerning this subject, and that is God’s grand vision for unity and reconciliation. In fact, for today’s message I want to give you the main point up front so we can see where we are going. Your main point is this:

From the beginning, to the middle, to the end, God’s grand vision is for unity and reconciliation.

Why do I say this? Well, let’s start at the very beginning of creation. If you have a Bible, turn to Genesis 1:26. Let me give you a little backstory. By the time we get to verse 26, God has already created a lot of the beautiful things we see in this world—huge trees, massive oceans, maybe even a platypus or two. However, something is still missing, a crucial piece of God’s plan. And this is where we see it unfold. Read with me.

Genesis 1:26-27 (CSB)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

Creation is pretty awesome. I don’t know what you think about when I say the word “creation,” but I think of giant waves in Hawaii crashing onto sandy beaches. I think of awe-inspiring landmarks like the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. And yet as impressive as those are, they aren’t the pinnacle of God’s creation. The pinnacle of God’s creation is what we just read about—people. People created in God’s own image. This is a big deal! The fact that we are all created *by God* and *in God’s image* has huge implications for the subject of racism today. You see, if we are all created by God, this means we all have the same starting point. I love the way Minister and Civil-Rights-Activist John M. Perkins describes it. He says if the same God created us all then we are of “one blood.” This means we have the same value, worth, and dignity.

In fact, an ignorance of this truth is what led to the manmade system we know as “race” today. Categories of “race” were created for the sole purpose of treating people with darker skin as less than human. These categories were created to divide us and prop certain groups up as more

valuable than others. This is why the Bible doesn’t talk about race like we do today. There is no black, white, brown, or anything else. There is one race—the human race. However, even though the Bible doesn’t talk about race like we do today, it does talk about ethnicity, or social/geographical groups with common ancestral or cultural traits. Simply put, even though the Bible doesn’t talk about race, it does celebrate diversity.

This is an important distinction. Oftentimes when Christians say things like “the Bible doesn’t talk about race,” they follow it up with a call to colorblindness. In essence these people say if we could all ignore color, racism would end. There are a couple major problems with this though. For one, unless you are literally colorblind, we all see color. I’ve never been friends with someone for three years only to find out they were black all along. That’s ridiculous! The bigger problem though is a theological one. The fact is God loves color. He created color. Every sunset of orange, pink, and purple hues is God’s artistic handiwork. Which means every shade of skin from the lightest to the darkest is beautifully designed and should be celebrated not erased. This was God’s design from the beginning. To create people in His image, reflecting His beauty to the world. This is part of the reason racism is so offensive to God. We are belittling and devaluing His creation. We are playing God by picking and choosing who is valuable and who is not. And that’s a dangerous and arrogant game to play.

This is exactly what happened during the time of slavery in our country. Satan deceived many white Christians into believing that people with darker skin weren’t made in the image of God. Because of this costly lie—and the willingness of white people to believe it—people of color were exploited in horrible, humiliating, and hurtful ways. This is why it’s so important to understand that we all come from one bloodline, and reflect our creator through a beautiful tapestry of diversity. So, now you can see God’s desire for unity all the way back at the beginning.

Sadly, this perfect unity crumbled and cracked just a couple chapters later when Satan entered the scene. He slithered his way into the garden and deceived Adam and Eve into eating the forbidden fruit, resulting in the fall of man. Thus sin entered the world and equality came under attack. But he didn’t *destroy* God’s desire or plan for unity and reconciliation. He’s not that powerful. Let’s jump ahead to the middle of history and I’ll show you.

God’s Grand Vision - The Middle:

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