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The Jesus Quotient: IQ -> EQ -> AQ

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE JESUS QUOTIENT:

$IQ \rightarrow EQ \rightarrow AQ$

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

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DEDICATION

To Miles, Piper, Mattie, Josie, and Carson: that they may lead with remarkable joy, passion, love, wisdom, peace, and intentionality on whatever paths God may open.

And to Karl, with gratitude and love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When we lay before Yahweh a well-defined plan and ask for a blessing, He may bless. But when we lay *ourselves* before Yahweh with unreachable dreams and a humble heart, He begins to make the impossible possible. Awe to El Shaddai for another impossibility, another opportunity, another surprise, another *no* morphed into *yes*.

EPIGRAPH

What people don't realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross.

– Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being*

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PREFACE

When I walked into the classroom at a few minutes before six on a Thursday evening in May, the students sat stiffly in their seats, thumbing through social media and clearly wary of whatever might come next. I plugged in my laptop, turned on the overhead projector, and sat on the front table to face them. My hearty “hello” was met with smiles and nods, but the tension in the room was palpable. “Just so you know, we are all atheists,” one student pronounced with a challenging tilt of her head. “We really don’t know why we have to take this course.” The course was MGOL 407: Christian Faith & Thought, and I had been warned by peers that this particular cohort wanted nothing to do with faith, religion, Scripture, or God. Knowing of their skepticism, I had been looking forward to this evening for months, and I was not disappointed. My greatest goal was that the students felt heard, understood, and safe enough to begin to explore their own belief systems, and in the course of that one evening, the progress they made was profound.

I began with my story – a tale of searching, belief, doubt, skepticism, anger, postmodern quandary, and, at long last, deep resolve – and I could feel the tension begin to dissipate. The students were surprised that I, too, had doubted, questioned, and rejected, and that my journey had brought me to a place of otherworldly peace, joy, and anticipation. They were surprised that I was not there to proclaim commandments or unearth their sin. They were surprised that I wanted to hear from them. We spent the bulk of the four-hour class listening to their stories: their experiences with the church, with religion, with pastors, with hypocrisy, with shame, with broken promises, and with hurt so deep that several of them could not yet see how it defined their lives. One student

announced that the last time she had tried to attend a church service with her husband and children, she had passed out in the church atrium when the trauma of past wrongs engulfed her; her hands shook as she told the story. Another student revealed that a male pastor she had known in her teen years had told her and her family repeatedly that if she did not change her assertive ways, she would never be allowed into heaven. Other students recounted memories of angry sermons and shaming conversations with self-described Christians. We realized together over the course of the evening that the nonbelief of atheism did not accurately define these students' experiences. Every student in that course had been wounded by the church or by someone claiming to represent the church, and the only way they knew to absorb their pain was to reject the God who condoned such evil. They were angry and hurt, but they wanted desperately for "God" to be real – just not in the way religion and the culture had presented Him to them thus far.

In our six weeks together, the students covered the classroom's white boards with unfiltered questions; role played varying worldviews to learn to better articulate their own; listened to one another's tears about the past, and joys and fears about the future; quarreled, laughed, and wondered; opened the book of Matthew for the first time to begin to experience who Jesus was; pondered C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*; acknowledged their own desire for something broader, more meaningful, and more steadfast than they; and attended a church service of their own choosing. While these students opened themselves to consider Christianity anew, many never have that opportunity, instead remaining mired in anger and hurt caused by an unseeing church. In my more than two decades of university teaching and church leadership, I have witnessed again and again the ramifications of pharisaical Christianity. While the deliverers may be well-intended,

their inattention to the ripples of damage reverberating from their teaching is destroying lives. God came to earth in human form more than two millennia ago to warn us about our hypocritical allegiance to empty laws, and yet we continue to repeat the very patterns that he spoke against. Without integrity, intentionality, and love for both our neighbor and our enemy, we cannot expect more than dismissive disdain from those outside the church. If we hope to be heard, we have to begin with ourselves. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!” Jesus warns in Matthew 23. “You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”¹ How will we open the door and hold it open, ensuring as we do that our faces reflect the joy and love that Jesus promises?

¹ Matt. 23:13 (NIV).

ABSTRACT

While we have discussed home churches and missional community involvement in recent decades, we have done little to acknowledge that the vernacular Tim Keller calls us to² is nearly impossible to achieve in a culture that is deeply entrenched with biblical mythologies. How do we speak without raising walls of assumption, judgment, defensiveness, or anger? How do we assess the criticisms or hurt of others if we cannot identify our own? Jesus did not ponder IQ or EQ. He knew his God-given purpose and emotional character so deeply that he was able to operate out of those foundations without pausing to ponder His next best step. Jesus' example presses us to step into a third quotient that is best referred to as "Audience Quotient." AQ is our ability to focus fully on another: to love as we have been loved, to see as we are seen, and to teach and disciple as Jesus taught us to do. It is time we train university and church leaders to transcend from IQ to EQ to AQ, aspiring to a Jesus Quotient that aligns with the Great Commission in ways that will help us to (re)sign the church³ as a safe place for renewal, energy, peace, and joy, rather than the hypocrisy and judgmentalism that has maligned its name for generations.

This dissertation outlines the premise for a nonfiction book that will serve as an introduction to and guide for understanding IQ, EQ, and AQ among pastoral and bivocational church leaders. Section 1 considers the myopic view of the twenty-first-century church, locking us into a prison house of linguistic pitfalls and pharisaical

² Tim Keller, "The Missional Church," June 2001, accessed August 29, 2015, http://www.download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Missional_Church-Keller.pdf.

³ Crystal L. Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012) 83.

hypocrisies; Section 2 examines mislaid attempts of the Reformed Church in recent years; Section 3 proposes a new examination of Audience Quotient, pointing leaders closer to Jesus' example of empathetic leadership; Section 4 outlines the artifact in Appendix A; Section 5 includes an artifact specification that addresses purpose, audience, and marketing; and Section 6 is a discussion of the dissertation process, followed by the artifact itself in Appendix A and a Bibliography of resources referenced.

SECTION 1:

THE PROBLEM

The Jesus Problem

When Texas Pastor David Grisham of Last Frontier Evangelism shouted anti-Santa sentiments at Westgate Mall in Amarillo in December 2016, parents waiting in line with their children to see Santa Claus were not amused. “‘Kids, I want to tell you today that there is no such thing as Santa Claus,’ [Grisham] yelled at the crowd waiting in line. ‘The Christmas season is about Jesus. ... The man you’re going to see today is just a man in a suit, dressed up like Santa, but Santa does not exist. Santa’s not real.’”⁴ Parents attempted to confront Grisham to get him to stop, but Grisham appeared nonplussed as he continued his tirade, filming himself with a cell phone as he evangelized in a video that has since gone viral. “It’s the spirit of Jesus that moved the pastor of Last Frontier Evangelism to rail against Santa,” CNN correspondent Jeanne Moos quipped, equating Grisham’s comments with an absent spirit of Christmas.⁵ Unfortunately, the reporter’s sentiment is far from isolated. Consider philosopher Bertrand Russell’s words in *Why I Am Not a Christian*: “The more intense has been the religion of any period and the more profound has been the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs.”⁶ Russell later argues that Christian religion, “as organized in its churches,” is the “principal enemy of moral progress in the world”: “In the so-called ages

⁴ Jessica Chasmar, “Texas Pastor Films Himself Telling Children in Line at Mall that Santa Isn’t Real,” Washington Times, December 12, 2016, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/dec/12/david-grisham-texas-pastor-tells-kids-in-line-at-m/>.

⁵ Jeanne Moos, “Pastor to Kids: Santa Is a Man in a Suit,” CNN, December 13, 2016, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2016/12/13/santa-yells-kids-texas-mall-moos-pkg-erin.cnn/video/playlists/wacky-world-of-jeanne-moos/>.

⁶ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 20.

of faith, when men really did believe the Christian religion in all its completeness, there was the Inquisition, with its tortures; there were millions of unfortunate women burned as witches; and there was every kind of cruelty practiced upon all sorts of people in the name of religion.”⁷ In a phrase, Christians have a horrible reputation – and the sooner we acknowledge the depth of the pain, distrust, and anger, the better equipped we will be to rebuild.

When Pastor Adam Phillips moved to Portland to start Christ Church in 2014 as an emerging leader in the Evangelical Covenant Church, the story that he likely anticipated was one of growth and good fruit. But when Phillips took a stance in favor of full inclusivity at his new church, including the LGBTQ community, his denomination kicked him out. “I’ve never gotten hate mail before – just terrible stuff, really toxic, saying that we had betrayed Jesus and that I was going to go to hell unless I repented and changed my beliefs,” Phillips said in a new documentary by *The Atlantic*.⁸ While Phillips’ Christ Church congregation has recovered from its split and is now thriving, Phillips’ experience is familiar to far too many. “The Bible is very clear on what it means to love God and love our neighbor as ourself,” Phillips said.⁹ But how many people are aware of the reality of what Scripture teaches and what Jesus stood for? The hurt the church has incurred runs so deep that today’s neo-postmodern culture simply assumes its presence. And the infractions occur not only church-to-culture but also church-within-

⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

⁸ Antonia Blumberg, “Evangelical Pastor Shunned for Welcoming LGBT People Has a New Thriving Congregation,” *The Huffington Post*, December 8, 2016, accessed December 13, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/evangelical-pastor-shunned-for-welcoming-lgbt-people-has-a-new-thriving-congregation_us_5848a876e4b0d0aa037f31ad.

⁹ Ibid.

church. As Philip Yancey reminds us in *What Good Is God?* the schisms within the church are ever-deepening, an example to the unchurched of how divisive Christians must be: “By last report there are 38,000 different Christian denominations in the world. There used to be 37,999 until one person decided he or she had a corner on truth that made his church more ‘pure’ than all the rest and formed a new denomination or cult.”¹⁰ For the authors of *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith*, the damage wrought is difficult to measure: “As Christians, we are guilty before God and before the world. God sees it. The world sees it – and because the world sees our sin and perceives that we have not removed the log from our own eye before calling out the specks in the eyes of others, our hypocrisy has been exposed. We have damaged our own witness to the world.”¹¹ Before we ask forgiveness and assure the world that we will change our ways, however, we need to articulate the hurt and measure the cost. When a child or spouse offers a blanket “I’m sorry” without acknowledging the wrong that occurred, the recipient is often left feeling uneasy and distrustful. The best apology is one that fully defines the injustice, seeking reparation with humility, vulnerability, and an earnest desire to seek a new path. How, then, do we begin to repair?

Myopia

It is difficult to right a wrong, however, when we have no awareness of the wrong that occurred in the first place. Our pastor confessed recently his great surprise when a friend of his expressed wariness about the church. Church people are hypocritical, this

¹⁰ Philip Yancey, *What Good is God? In Search of a Faith That Matters* (New York: FaithWords, 2010), 274.

¹¹ Mae Elise Cannon, Lisa Sharon Harper, Troy Jackson, and Soong-Chan Rah, *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 21-22.

man told our pastor, and the risk of rejection and betrayal is just too great. Our pastor expressed surprise and sorrow at his words, since this was not his experience with the church and he was unsure why this friend would have such an impression. As a bivocational church leader, I can see where a pastor dutifully trained in seminary and mentored in how best to shepherd his flock might inadvertently sidestep the cultural wave that says *no* to church hypocrisy and *yes* to relativism and self-help. Another pastor friend has mourned aloud that his time and circles are so narrow that he does not have nonbelieving friends and therefore feels out of touch with the anger and assumptions of his neighbors who are outside of the church. Jody Wiley Fernando argues that our fear of conflict is often the reason why do not fully engage – whether in situations of religion or race. When whites portray themselves as “colorblind,” for example, they are not listening to the realities around them: “When white people ‘participate’ in the conversation by smugly crossing our arms, silently observing from a distance, assuming we know better, or arrogantly refusing to consider other perspectives, we only perpetuate the system we’ve inherited.”¹² For Debby Irving, the myopia of whiteness is unintentional and personally frustrating: “If you can’t see a problem for what it is, how can you step in and be a part of its solution no matter how good a person you are?”¹³ As she began to explore her own cultural presumptions in adulthood, Irving realized that her myopic outlook on life had been created for her at an early age: “Over time I internalized what I’d been taught as right, so that it didn’t just feel right – it felt normal, like the only legitimate way

¹² Jody Wiley Fernando, *Pondering Privilege: Toward a Deeper Understanding of Whiteness, Race, and Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: NextStep Publishers, 2014), 42.

¹³ Debby Irving, *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press, 2014), 98.

to think and act. Anyone who followed a different code of behavior was not only different but weird, or perhaps even rude.”¹⁴ In the church, our cultural short-sightedness mirrors the myopia Wiley Fernando and Irving describe, drastically limiting our ability to have any kind of notable impact on the very people we hope to share the gospel with.

In his book *The Social Animal*, David Brooks blames our myopia on human overconfidence:

The human mind is an overconfidence machine. The conscious level gives itself credit for things it really didn't do and confabulates tales to create the illusion it controls things it really doesn't determine. Ninety percent of drivers believe they are above average behind the wheel. Ninety-four percent of college professors think they are above-average teachers. Ninety percent of entrepreneurs think that their new business will be a success. Ninety-eight percent of students who take the SAT say they have average or above-average leadership skills.¹⁵

When we assume our own righteousness, it is difficult to be humble. Daniel Migliore equates this over-confidence with a dangerously incomplete understanding of who God is. “Apart from hope in God, every Christian doctrine becomes distorted,” Migliore argues, and a flawed doctrine is precisely what can lead to the hurt the church has inflicted.¹⁶ A Holy Spirit-inspired biblical witness does not confabulate or distort, and any human short-sightedness is repeatedly broadened by hope and faith. Dan Merchant suggests that our tendency to slide into a false us-versus-them dichotomy is the culprit: “There are people who feel the division in America is justified and inevitable because they are right and the others are wrong,” Merchant writes. “Some of these people write books explaining how uninformed or dishonest the other side is. I wonder sometimes if

¹⁴ Irving, 65.

¹⁵ David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2012), 218.

¹⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 347.

their books would sell as many if they chose a theme other than ‘us versus them.’”¹⁷ The problem, Merchant continues, is that we typically ignore information that does not adequately contextualize or affirm our agenda, a realization that aligns with both Brooks’ and Migliore’s assertions.

Our view will remain myopic as long as we cling to a self-defensive ideology that is over-confident, agenda-driven, and accusatory. As Donald Miller reminds us in *Searching for God Knows What*, Paul did not turn on his aggressors after he switched from persecuting Christians to preaching the Gospel. In fact, Paul so publicly appreciated the pagans who worshipped false idols that they sometimes invited him to join their gatherings to share about Jesus. Why are we not able to hold to such a loving, biblical approach? As Miller writes, Paul’s empathy is a far cry from the top-down privileged stance of today’s church in America: “We are in the margins of society and so we have to have our own radio stations and television stations and bookstores. Our formulaic, propositional, lifeboat-territorial methodology has crippled the kingdom of God,” Miller argues.¹⁸ The moral us-versus-them argument bears no resemblance to the Gospel of grace, and it only serves to further the myopia that entraps and separates us from the culture that surrounds us. As Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2, we are called to live in the world in such a way that those around us witness the Holy Spirit: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us,” Peter writes.¹⁹ When we don’t, we

¹⁷ Dan Merchant, *Lord Save Us from Your Followers: Why is the Gospel of Love Dividing America?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2008), 20.

¹⁸ Donald Miller, *Searching for God Knows What* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004), 190.

¹⁹ 1 Pet. 2:12.

become a part of the problem, which is directly antithetical to the Gospel. And when we are the problem and we are espousing Jesus, those around us can't help but see Jesus as the problem. The battle we are waging is a spiritual battle against the principalities of darkness, Miller writes, not against the people who don't yet believe as we do: "In war you shoot the enemy, not the hostage."²⁰

Prison-House

But our myopia may not be entirely our own doing. As literary critic and political theorist Fredric Jameson posits in his 1972 book *The Prison-House of Language*, the symbolic nature of the words we use to express our reality are problematic in themselves: "My guiding thread and permanent preoccupation in these pages has been to clarify the relationships possible between the synchronic methods of Saussurean linguistics and the realities of time and history itself."²¹ In Jameson's view, we need not stand in moralistic opposition to cultural phenomenon when they are indicative of linguistic limitations and unique modes of experience. Instead it behooves us to analyze cultural swings with a sensitivity toward the markers that limit: labor conditions that lead to inadequate basic needs, for example, or distinct social classes that muddy a normative grounding. Jameson continues in *The Political Unconscious*: "It would seem therefore more useful to ask ourselves, in conclusion, how History as a ground and as an absent cause can be conceived in such a way as to resist such thematization or reification, such transformation

²⁰ Miller, 191.

²¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), x.

back into one optional code among others.”²² As church leaders, what responsibility do we hold in differentiating between signs and history, symbols and meaning? How do we help the culture to resist reification of codes that suggest the myopic limitations of us-versus-them and other non-biblical moral entrapments?

For Marshall McLuhan, the prison-house shackles came in the form of a new kind of twentieth-century media finding itself at odds with the restrictive assumptions of nineteenth-century perceptions. Consider his words in *Understanding Media*:

The power of the arts to anticipate future social and technological developments, by a generation and more, has long been recognized. In this century Ezra Pound called the artist “the antennae of the race.” Art as radar acts as “an early alarm system,” as it were, enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them. This concept of the arts as prophetic, contrasts with the popular idea of theme as mere self-expression. If art is an “early warning system,” to use the phrase from World War II, when radar was new, art has the utmost relevance not only to media study but to the development of media controls.²³

McLuhan, an English professor whose theories of media and culture were profoundly influential in the 1960s and 1970s, argued that our broader understanding of meaning should come from the medium itself rather than the content: “What we are considering here ... are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.”²⁴ When we become consumed by moral arguments about a twenty-first century social media whose content we find offensive, in other words, we are missing the point of the larger cultural

²² Fredric Jameson, “The Political Unconscious,” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1998), 1187.

²³ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; repr., Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2015), 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

swing; we are succumbing to the us-versus-them focus that rarely allows for progressive thought or even adequate understanding. In Quentin Fiore's image-laden reworking of McLuhan's text as *The Medium is the Massage*, we see echoes of cultural conflict that hold eerily true today: "Environments are invisible. Their groundrules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns elude easy perception," McLuhan writes on one seemingly code-free white double-truck page.²⁵ And later, on a page stamped with a black-and-white silhouette of figures prancing across a field in a Dance of Death, McLuhan writes, "Our official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old."²⁶ But if, as Irving asks, we can't see a problem for what it is, are we to be held responsible for its resounding cultural nuances? Without question, yes. As leaders in the church, our responsibility here is biblical and unwavering: We are called to love God, love our neighbor, love our enemies, and go and make disciples of all nations. To escape the myopic prison-house of our own cultural restraints, we must be humble, vulnerable, and Holy Spirit-reliant.

In his recent book *Bounce*, Matthew Syed complicates the matter by suggesting that our faith in itself is the placebo that misleads, not our encounter with the culture that surrounds us. His argument is not a moral one, Syed insists, but a practical one that acknowledges that religion, much like packaging or a medium, communicates emotional assurances that can have a placebo effect:

The key point in all this is that the power of the mind is exercised through the medium of belief, and it doesn't matter whether the belief is true or false or how the delusion is created – so long as it is created successfully. It doesn't matter if it is created by a reassuring doctor, slick packaging, price, advertising, color,

²⁵ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 1996), 84-85.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

invasiveness, ritual, or any of countless other possibilities. It does not matter if it is supported by fabricated evidence or no evidence at all. All that matters is that the patient *believes*.²⁷

Syed makes a point here that should not be overlooked. As Christians, in our effort to be good people – as Irving suggests – we may choose to confront our own myopic worldview and the prison-house of our language with an intentional reliance on God, faith, and belief. And while this may appear at the outset like an admirable and biblical move, we need to take care not to affirm Syed’s pithy statement that Christians are “understandably quick to trumpet this phenomenon, proclaiming that God is actively involved in dishing out health benefits to his chosen few.”²⁸ The danger arises when the belief that has become our placebo is grounded in myopic assumptions rather than Holy Spirit love; therein lies the prison-house of the twenty-first century church.

(Re)signing

When signifiers become intrinsically embedded within signifieds, it can be nearly impossible to speak to one another without offending or at least imparting meanings that we never intended or may never realize were received. Crystal Downing acknowledges the complexity of semiotic context in her book *Changing Signs of Truth*: “Separating the signifier from the signified within a particular synchronic system is like trying to detach one side of a sheet of paper from another,” Downing writes. “Like it or not, we must be sensitive to how changes in *langue* alter the signified meaning of the signifiers we use.”²⁹

²⁷ Matthew Syed, *Bounce: Mozart, Federer, Picasso, Beckham, and the Science of Success* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 158.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁹ Downing, 109.

The problem, Downing continues, is when the words we use function as “stop-signs to communication.”³⁰ When the signifiers no longer point to the appropriate signifieds, it is time for us to (re)sign the language we use.³¹ According to John Piper, we need to be bold enough to find new ways to impart the enormity of the Gospel: “Most of us are virtually impervious to the radical implications of familiar language,” Piper writes in defense of his decision to rely on the word “hedonism” in *Desiring God*. “My heart has been arrested and my life has been deeply jolted by the teachings of Christian Hedonism. It is not an easy or comfortably philosophy. It is extremely threatening to nominal Christians.”³² And yet that is precisely why Piper chooses to (re)sign language as he does: “The chief effect of the term is not that it creates a stumbling block to the truth,” Piper continues, “but that it wakens people to the fact that the truth itself is a stumbling block – and often a very different one than they expected.”³³ We see Jesus doing this throughout the New Testament – when He compares His coming to that of a thief in Matthew 24:42-44, for example, or when he praises a dishonest and shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-15.

Another challenge we face is that the human adult brain operates by pattern recognition rather than logic, which means that it naturally seeks existing patterns in order to make meaning out of new information. As Kathleen Taylor and Catherina Marienau discuss in *Facilitating Learning with the Adult Brain in Mind*, a new idea is

³⁰ Downing, 63.

³¹ Ibid., 22.

³² John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 311.

³³ Ibid.

typically described by another name that most closely parallels the new; consider *horseless carriage*, for example. “In essence, the brain cannot recognize (*re-cognize*: literally, know again) that which it does not already know, at least by analogy,” Taylor and Marienau write.³⁴ As patterns are repeatedly reactivated in the adult brain, the pathways begin to entrench themselves, easing difficult neural networks but complicating the process of introducing new ideas: “Although the brain is plastic and constantly changing, deeply rooted patterns become not just the Broadways but the Grand Canyons of neural networks, where the rivers of experience have cut deeply into the bedrock. Anthropologists and sociologists call these patterns *culture*.”³⁵ I find it curiously concerning, therefore, when church leaders lay blame on “the media” or “the culture,” when both are essentially offshoots of who we are and how we think. Rather than placing blame or otherwise enforcing a dangerous us-versus-them mentality, how can we instead focus our energy on (re)signing the myopic signifiers that define our unfortunate reputation in a culture that is thirsting for greater meaning?

N. T. Wright is a bishop and scholar who seeks to redefine the church’s message in ways that may begin to open the right pathways. *Simply Christian*, Wright’s twenty-first-century rewriting of C. S. Lewis’ twentieth-century *Mere Christianity*, is Wright’s attempt to make relevant the brilliant apologetics that Lewis employed in the 1930s and 1940s. In *Surprised By Hope*, Wright seeks to define the hope of the gospel in twenty-first-century terms, as well as articulate practical ways for people to foster hope in their communities. And in *The Day the Revolution Began*, Wright argues that we Christians

³⁴ Kathleen Taylor and Catherine Marienau, *Facilitating Learning with the Adult Brain in Mind: A Conceptual and Practical Guide* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 42.

³⁵ Taylor and Marienau, 44.

have lost the meaning behind the cross as signifier for something far greater than mere good works:

The Western church ... has been so concerned with getting to heaven, with sin as the problem blocking the way, and therefore with how to remove sin and its punishment, that it has jumped straight to passages in Paul that can be made to serve that purpose. It has forgotten that the gospels are replete with atonement theology, through and through – only they give it to us not as a neat little system, but as a powerful, sprawling, many-sided, richly revelatory narrative in which we are invited to find ourselves, or rather to lose ourselves and to be found again on the other side.³⁶

While I admire Wright's work and I appreciate his passion to move things forward, I find the language in all three of the books mentioned here mired in the same signifier-signified prison-house that Donald Miller eschews. As Wright presents Christianity as a viable answer in *Simply Christian*, for example, he slides into the Christianese that too often slams stop signs into the faces of secular skeptics: "Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfillment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this – the finding, the saving, the giving of new life – in Jesus."³⁷ Nearly every word in Wright's sentence here rings with misappropriated signifiers and myopic Christian assumptions of how and what will be received: *Christianity, belief, living God, fulfillment of promises, story of Israel, finding, saving, new life, Jesus*. If the word *Jesus* is the ultimate signified that calls forth the most erroneous signifiers, how can we expect to embark on the Great Commission³⁸ with any degree of success?

³⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*, (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 415-416.

³⁷ N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 92.

³⁸ Matt. 28:16-20.

SECTION 2:
OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

An Elusive Gospel

The fender-bender looked inconsequential to me, but it was enough to bring both drivers out into the road, arms raised and shouting. I could not hear what the woman whose car had been hit was saying, but her fists were clenched and her cheeks were flushed as she berated the other driver. The young man who had caused the accident had raised his voice to match hers, and I heard him repeat again and again as I slowly drove by, “But I have to get to work. I have to get to work.” They were arguing with each other about a minor car accident from which I could see no damage to either car, and yet the heated conversation was not about the accident at all. The young man was responding from the anxiety of a job that likely paid necessary bills, and the woman was expressing her own anger and fear about whatever was going on in her life in and around that moment. Both individuals were looking directly at one another, but neither could hear or see the other with any clarity. The moment was fleeting as my line of westbound traffic inched along, pressing me forward, but it disturbed me. How often do we speak to one another with no knowledge or recognition of the other’s backstory? More importantly, how often do we speak to one another with no recognition of our own backstory? Pope Francis acknowledged this danger in a recent homily about hypocrisy: Catholics who follow their ritual observances mindfully but neglect to behave biblically in their daily lives are living a double life that is scandalous, he said. “It’s better to be an atheist” than a hypocritical Christian, he continued.³⁹ In his newest book *The Bad Habits of Jesus*,

³⁹ Julie Zauzmer, “Pope Francis Suggests It’s Better to be an Atheist than a Hypocritical Catholic,” *The Washington Post*, February 23, 2017, accessed April 23, 2017,

Leonard Sweet challenges readers to recognize the supernatural brilliance of what others might consider Jesus' "bad habits": "The religious establishment of Jesus' day were good – no, they were great. In fact, there was nobody better at keeping a list than the Pharisees were. The problem was they were so good, they thought they had it all wrapped up."⁴⁰ In what ways do we, as Christian leaders, operate from a hypocritical assumption that we, too, have it "all wrapped up," never pausing to recognize the backstories contorting the shoulders of our listeners and creating a grotesque malformation on our own? How can we speak to one another, let alone listen, when we have not yet learned to live the authentic lives that Jesus calls us to? And yet we do speak, as we have for generations since Jesus was crucified, spreading a Gospel that seems elusive to us as we continually seek new and more progressive ways to spread the Kingdom.

By Might

The first way the Reformed Church has sought to share the Gospel is by might – an ironic effort given the foundations of the Protestant Reformation. As Bruce Gordon writes in his chapter about religious life on the eve of the Reformation, the true character of Christianity in the early 1500s was confusing and deceptive: "The Church in the world, Christ's bride, was everything her contemporary advocates and critics claimed – fervent in worship, devout in prayer, rich in sacramental reverence, fearful of the afterlife, and zealous in pious works and gifts. At times, the Church was poisoned by

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/02/23/pope-francis-praises-the-torah-and-suggests-its-better-to-be-an-atheist-than-a-bad-catholic/?utm_term=.38913072ce11.

⁴⁰ Leonard Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 192.

corruption and venality in her highest offices and drained of life by indolence in her lowest,” Gordon writes.⁴¹ And while the Reformation brought spiritual freedom from a hierarchy of Catholic doctrinal dictates and depravity, the fathers of the Reformation developed their own doctrines that birthed a new church marked with new ill-defined backstories. Martin Luther’s ideas about marriage and women, for example, were decidedly demeaning and androcentric: “For example, as early as 1520 he wrote that if a woman could not have a child by her husband then she should take her husband’s brother aside and contract a secret marriage with him, an idea which [Luther] repeated in his treatise on marriage in 1522.”⁴² The authors of *If Eve Only Knew* echo this concern when they remind readers that the Bible ultimately is a book about Christ-inspired freedom, and yet the evangelical church has done much to subjugate women who should otherwise feel unrestrained by secular rules:

The Bible is, after all, the ultimate grand story of liberation. Mixed with this journey to freedom are voices that doubt, voices that call women and men away from deeper truths, voices that tempt us to question who we are and why we are here. These messages perpetuate the false notion that women are created to be less than and subjugated to men; that their value lies in a sexuality that is controlled by men; that women are most godly when they are wives and mothers, serving their husbands and families with little consideration of their own autonomy and individual callings. But these are false assumptions that are not consistent with the biblical call of liberation.⁴³

Luther and others entered the Reformation with a premise of liberation, but somewhere along the way we become distracted by the mundane quandaries that surely need our

⁴¹ Bruce Gordon, “Late Medieval Christianity,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

⁴² Lyndal Roper, “Martin Luther,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64.

⁴³ Kendra Weddle Irons and Melanie Springer Mock, *If Eve Only Knew: Freeing Yourself From Biblical Womanhood & Becoming All God Means for You to Be* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2015), 186.

wisdom and rule-declaring abilities – often to the detriment of those we most want to bless with the Gospel.

According to writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, the chasm is wide. Americans too often subscribe to irreducible truths that are not truths at all but social mythologies propagated by a dominant culture: “Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible – this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white.”⁴⁴ So if the lines of subjugation are false and Jesus came to earth in human form to tell us to stop pouring ourselves into legalisms that separate us from authentic relationships with one another, why do we continue to do what he asked us not to do? Coates’ bestselling book is a letter to his teenage son, a brave tumble into social and political history that has resulted in generational chains that Coates hopes to loosen with his words: “I wanted you to have your own life, apart from fear – even apart from me. I am wounded. I am marked by old codes, which shielded me in one world and then chained me in the next.”⁴⁵ If we consider the son in Coates’ story, the women in Irons and Mock’s book, and the man and woman whose cars collided on the neighborhood street, we see the “old codes” of both daily life and former generations that make it difficult for us to speak to one another. Despite its efforts to ensure spiritual freedom, the Reformed Church reverberates with these aging chains, insistent that women are more fulfilled in subservient roles and Jesus had fair skin and a radiant smile.

⁴⁴ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 7.

⁴⁵ Coates, 125.

In *The Culture Map*, Erin Meyer describes the implicit communication in Japanese culture that demands an adept ability to gauge how a listener is receiving the words we are speaking: “Every year in Japan there is a vote for the most popular new word. A few years ago, the word of the year was ‘KY.’ It stands for *kuyuki yomenai*, which means ‘one who cannot read the air’ – in other words, a person sorely lacking the ability to read between the lines. In Japan if you can’t read the air, you are not a good listener.”⁴⁶ Americans are decidedly KY people, Meyer quips, and yet our notably low context culture is marked by a highly idiomatic language that relies on metaphor and mythology, simile and story. Rather than the might of a state-sponsored church that demanded one-tenth tithes, offered priestly forgiveness, and threatened excommunication, the Reformed Church has presented the Gospel with the forceful might of a culture that refuses to acknowledge interpersonal nuance and a language that hinders even the most earnest attempt to speak a simple reality to one another. If we don’t acknowledge the backstories of our own lives, the generations that have come before us, the culture that surrounds us, and the church that informs our faith, how do we expect to share the Gospel in a way that is joyful, truthful, and genuine?

By Reason

A second way the Reformed Church has attempted to share the Gospel is through reason, an approach that emerges in part from the profound economic influence of doctrinal convictions on the emergence of capitalism in the western world. Alexandra Walsham reminds us of the reasonableness of the “Protestant work ethic” with its

⁴⁶ Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map: Breaking through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business* (New York: Perseus Books, 2014), 33.

emphasis on “industriousness, self-discipline, and thrift,” alongside “frugality, self-denial, and a dogged commitment to labour above leisure and pleasure.”⁴⁷ Compared to Catholics who wore their crucifixes and rosary beads boldly and who depended on priests for sanctification, the Protestants of the seventeenth century were a curious anomaly of simple dress, high moral standards, and intellectual prowess. In his 2015 book *How We Learn*, Benedict Carey describes well our propensity for the patterns and satisfactions of reason:

Learning scientists like embedded hierarchy problems because they model the sort of reasoning we have to do all the time, to understand work politics as well as math problems. We have to remember individual relationships, which is straight retention. We have to use those to induce logical extensions: if $A > B$ and $B > C$, then A must be $> C$. Finally, we need to incorporate those logical steps into a larger framework, to *deduce* the relationships between people or symbols that are distantly related. When successful, we build a bird’s-eye view, a system to judge the relationship between any two figures in the defined universe, literary or symbolic, that’s invisible to the untrained mind.⁴⁸

As scholars and scientists have studied the brain and our capacity to learn, Christian apologists have met those developments with an increasingly complex understanding of how we understand Scripture and the supernatural power that embodies it; consider G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Richard Swinburne, Lee Strobel, Alister McGrath, N. T. Wright, and others. But logical reasoning is not the enormity of what Jesus calls us to. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 2, without the Holy Spirit, our church-led reasoning makes little sense to the nonbeliever anyway: “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-

⁴⁷ Alexandra Walsham, “Reformation Legacies,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 240.

⁴⁸ Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2014), 203.

taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”⁴⁹

Consider, for example, Dallas Willard’s discussion of Nietzsche and moral goodness: “Friedrich Nietzsche is usually thought of as a bitter opponent of Jesus. But he clearly saw his indispensable role in the civilization into which Nietzsche himself had been born,” Willard writes.⁵⁰ In other words, the impact of Jesus’ teachings on the world was so profound that it redefined the philosophical axis on which we balance conversations about good, evil, truth, longing, relationships, and authenticity. Jesus was a master of using the particular – specific moments grounded in the social and cultural context of his listeners – to bring us to the universal: comprehensive moral theory that reverberates through the writings of such influential thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, Wesley, and Bonhoeffer.⁵¹ But when the western Reformed Church relies on reason to forward the truth of the Gospel, the effect is stagnant, uninspired, and unlikely to convince a nonbeliever whose reality is a scaffolding of worldly logic and errant emotions. While Christian apologetics has its place, particularly among nonbelievers who are seeking, rational theology cannot explain well the miracle of the Holy Spirit, as Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 2 above.

⁴⁹ 1 Cor. 2:13-14

⁵⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997), 131.

⁵¹ Ibid., 130.

By Spectacle

The third way American churches attempt to entice newcomers through their doors is by spectacle: the bigger and bolder, the better. As church attendance began to wane in the United States in the tumultuous 1960s, the concept of “megachurches” emerged alongside an intensifying dependence on colorful mediums such as television:

American businessmen discovered, long before the rest of us, that the quality and usefulness of their goods are subordinate to the artifice of their display; that, in fact, half the principles of capitalism as praised by Adam Smith or condemned by Karl Marx are irrelevant. Even the Japanese, who are said to make better cars than the Americans, know that economics is less a science than a performing art, as Toyota’s yearly advertising budget confirms.⁵²

When pastors join the fray in an attempt to bring forward a Gospel that is culturally relevant, the result can be disastrous. Neil Postman continues in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* with a memory of watching Billy Graham exchanging quips with George Burns, the comedian who was revered in his later years for his role in the *Oh, God!* movies: “Although the Bible makes no mention of it, the Reverend Graham assured the audience that God loves those who make people laugh. It was an honest mistake,” Postman continues. “He merely mistook NBC for God.”⁵³ When we fall into the programming/entertainment trap, we assume that our ability to capture an audience’s attention with colorful, comical, memorable visuals is the best way to bring new believers into the Kingdom; and we forget that Jesus did none of this. In fact, his approach was quite the opposite: He visited with untouchables, he washed others’ dirty toes, he asked his disciples to give up all worldly goods to become itinerant preachers, and he rode into Jerusalem on the back of an unbroken donkey.

⁵² Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 4-5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

In their book *The Permanent Revolution*, Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim warn against the “superpastor” or “hotshot CEO type.”⁵⁴ Little good can come of pastors who quote Scripture handily and put again an impressive show but have no theological depth, Hirsch and Catchim write. In fact, the displays that come from program-focused ministries often become the “easy straw man” that others call upon to point to the simplicity, irrelevance, and untruth of the Gospel: “At best, these writings are highly unlikely to convince the unconvinced, and at worst, they hinder the cause in the broader church.”⁵⁵ Much as Postman suggests in his critique of media culture, the spectacle of a performance-driven church entices followers for precisely the wrong reasons, leaving eventual empty pews or, worse yet, the hypocritical Christians that Pope Francis bemoaned. When we rely on human agency to spread the Gospel and build the church, the Holy Spirit has little room to enter in. The challenge, according to Hirsch and Catchim, lies with our willingness to risk: “We have huddled and cuddled, taught and preached, the church to near death. It’s time to grow up! It’s time to allow some holy chaos to enter so we can break loose from the iron cages of oligarchy and engage the missional challenge to extend the gospel in this century.”⁵⁶ The goal, they continue, is “inviting disequilibrium.”⁵⁷

Hirsch continues this discussion in *The Forgotten Ways* with a push for churches to move beyond the stage and spectacle to an acknowledgement of the cultural barriers they have left unacknowledged and unaddressed. Rather than focusing on performance,

⁵⁴ Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), xx.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 271.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

we should be looking at people – as Jesus did – and pondering the most effective ways to step outside of the inherent cultural reach that is most readily apparent. The institutional church has failed notably in sharing a Gospel that expresses the peace and joy Christ embodies: “[W]hen surveyed, the average non-Christian described a high degree of alienation. It seems that at present, most people report a ‘God? Yes! Church? No!’ type of response.”⁵⁸ Later in his book, Hirsch points to the organic systems necessary to grow the church as the living system Jesus intended. If we are all irreducibly interconnected by the Holy Spirit – and the propensity for the Holy Spirit in those who are seeking or soon-to-be-tapped, how can we engage the authenticity of the Gospel with the conversations we have, the decisions we make, and the Sunday services we host? If a broader view is required of an American church that has become overly insular in its efforts to open its doors wide and entice people inside with colors and fancy words, what will it mean to reimagine a Reformed Church that is motivated by mission and loving in character?

By Allure

Inspired by Hirsch’s ideas, the fourth way the Reformed Church has sought to spread the Kingdom is by the allure of Jesus’ sage and loving example. According to Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren in their book *Introducing the Missional Church*, the missional church seeks to turn on its head the approach that has informed church practices for generations: The approach should not be a church that seeks a mission but to recognize that God is a missional God who sends His people, they write: “Rather than the primary question being, ‘How do we attract people to what we are doing?’ it becomes,

⁵⁸ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 34.

‘What is God up to in this neighborhood?’ and “What are the ways we need to change in order to engage the people in our community who no longer consider church a part of their lives?’ That is what a missional imagination is about.”⁵⁹ Roxburgh echoes this call to community in his book *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, coupling the call with a sense of twenty-first-century impending doom:

This book articulates what might be involved in rethinking Christian life in an unthinkable world. It comes out of my own wrestling with questions about what God might be about in our neighborhoods, cities, towns, and villages. It seems to address questions about how we can faithfully engage during a time when so many of our churches have lost their capacity to engage the people in their communities.⁶⁰

The point is to stop focusing our planning on the church, Roxburgh argues, and instead focus our discussions on the people in our surrounding communities: Who are they? What are their needs? What are their hurts, aspirations, ponderings, longings, and relationships? What has their experience with the church been, and how might a new kind of church speak into their lives?

In *Missional Church*, Darrell L. Guder affirms our need for both a new approach and a new image: “The calling of the church to be missional – to be a sent community – leads the church to step beyond the given cultural forms that vary dubious assumptions about what the church is, what its public role should be, and what its voice should sound like.” The missional church movement is grounded not in recruitment inward but sending outward, Guder argues; it is in the going that we will find Holy Spirit-led moments to

⁵⁹ Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 20.

⁶⁰ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 16.

share the promises of the Kingdom.⁶¹ In *The Missional Church Perspective*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile suggest that a missional approach will help us to redefine our most basic idea of who God is: “Relational trinitarian theology gives us a vision that makes space for others to participate,” they write.⁶² But is this shift to a missional-minded, community focused church enough to spread the Gospel in a Jesus-honoring way? If we enter into the communities around us to share the allure, will the Kingdom spread?

J. Todd Billings argues that the “incarnational ministry” arm of missiology can be as dangerously misleading as the façade of might, reason, or spectacle:

I was told that just as God became flesh in a particular culture 2,000 years ago, my job was to become “incarnate” in another culture. Eight months later, equipped with training in cultural anthropology, I set about learning the language and culture in Uganda. But I quickly ran into doubts about the “incarnational” method. Would the Ugandans necessarily “see Jesus” as a result of my efforts at cultural identification? Was I assuming that my own present – rather than that of Christ – was redemptive? Is the eternal Word’s act of incarnation really an appropriate model for ministry?⁶³

Donald Miller writes at length about the danger of the allure in his book *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*. In a chapter titled “The Reason God Hasn’t Fixed You Yet,” Miller reminds us that God never intended to bring everything here on earth to perfection,⁶⁴ that kind of other-worldly peace and joy will come in heaven one day, and it can be

⁶¹ Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 109.

⁶² Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 109.

⁶³ J. Todd Billings, “The Problem with ‘Incarnational Ministry,’” *Christianity Today* 56, no. 7 (August 2012): 58, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://jtoddbillings.com/2012/12/the-problem-with-incarnational-ministry/>.

⁶⁴ Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: How I Learned to Live a Better Story* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 203.

dangerous when we send our church missionally out to extend promises that ultimately could smack of hypocrisy and deception in a way that mimics the state-run church that inspired the Reformation.

Stagnant Waters

As we continually look outward, seeking the approach that will make our work most effective and meaningful, most in line with the Great Commission of Matthew 28, is it possible that we are neglecting the essence of our salvation? If the aforementioned solutions are not spreading the Gospel in a way that is lasting and true, what should we be doing differently? The answer, I believe, is simple: It lies in our ability to look at ourselves with honesty and humility, acknowledging our own backstories before we begin to speak into the lives of those around us. The Gospel is a story of atonement, N. T. Wright reminds us in *The Day the Revolution Began*, and it is up to each of us to embrace our faith wholly and unabashedly:

We have gone wading in the shallow and stagnant waters of medieval questions and answers, taking care to put on the right footwear and not lose our balance, when only a few yards away is the vast and dangerous ocean of the gospel story, inviting us to plunge in and let the wild waves of dark glory wash us, wash over us, wash us through and through, and land us on the shores of God's new creation.⁶⁵

In Matthew 7:5, Jesus tells us to check our own eye for blemishes before we look to pluck the excess out of someone else's. Unlike us, Jesus had an unmatched IQ, an impeccable EQ, and a keen sense of AQ. Perhaps it would behoove us to follow his example more closely, seeking to improve our EQ before we step out into the world and assume that others will have the inclination and fortitude to listen.

⁶⁵ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, 416.

SECTION 3:

THESIS

From Missional to Meaningful

In his 2010 book *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*, Leonard Sweet argues for a new kind of evangelism:

The church has been more prone to “take a stand” on issues or “take a vote” on programs than touch. Touch is a centripetal force that includes and embraces. Taking stands is a centrifugal force that separates and divides. While the rest of the world is moving, the one taking a stand is frozen in time like kids playing freeze tag, waiting for the sign that says it’s okay to move again. Christ ran around touching people and tagging them. Every Jesus tag offered freedom. Every Jesus tag let the person tagged know they had been touched by God.⁶⁶

The Pharisees operated by centrifugal force; Jesus perpetuates a centripetal force. As a church, we know this, and yet our efforts to stand for truth in the twenty-first century invariably repel rather than attract. According to Dan Kimball, we are at a point where we need to offer both an apology and an apologetic: “While we need to stand strong on what we believe and need not be ashamed of the gospel in any way, we need to make sure we are presenting a biblical picture of the church and not perpetuating negative stereotypes. We need to offer an apologetic to correct misperceptions.”⁶⁷ The earliest roots of the missional movement, which has been a direct attempt to rescript our ecclesiastical centrifugal spin into an inclusive centripetal force, began with conversations in the early twentieth century about missionary methods that were deemed

⁶⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 242.

⁶⁷ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 250.

too reliant on western superiority.⁶⁸ As this healthy look at missionary ecclesiology spread, writers/theologians such as Darrell Guder, Ed Stetzer, Tim Keller, and Alan Hirsch carried the conversation into a broader church context in the late twentieth century, calling for a missional church. And while I agree with the end goal of the missional approach, I believe the movement will eventually fade away without a direct and intentional articulation of (1) emotional quotient (EQ) and (2) audience quotient (AQ).

As Sweet argues in *Me and We: God's New Social Gospel*, the world's structural problems will remain as long as the individual human heart is ailing: "The [social gospel] movement's demise has been the subject of vast speculation and scrutiny, but it can be seen perhaps best this way: social gospelers tried to save an ailing turtle by switching out its shell, one embossed with the name 'Christianity.'"⁶⁹ The missional movement is in danger of a similar end. If we don't pause in our discussion of the core ideas of missiology to consider how individual hearts can be strengthened and encouraged, missional ideas will never rise from rhetoric to reality. According to Gillian Tett, understanding the "messy gaps between rhetoric and reality" is critical: "Life does not always fit into the official descriptions of what people are *supposed* to do. Much of the time we ignore these messy realities."⁷⁰ How, then, do we ensure that our discussion of missional church adequately prepares, equips, and strengthens the hearts of those who are

⁶⁸ Scott Aniol, "A Brief History of the Missional Church Movement," *Religious Affections Ministries*, accessed April 23, 2016, <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-church/a-brief-history-of-the-missional-church-movement/>.

⁶⁹ Leonard Sweet, *Me and We: God's New Social Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 3.

⁷⁰ Gillian Tett, *The Silo Effect: The Peril of Expertise and the Promise of Breaking Down Barriers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 224.

sent to disciple? Are we embarking on missions – both around the globe and across the street – without properly training disciples? Peter Scazzero writes that a healthy understanding of self is essential: “The vast majority of us go to our graves without knowing who we are. We unconsciously live someone else’s life, or at least someone else’s expectations for us. This does violence to ourselves, our relationship with God, and ultimately others.”⁷¹ In an effort to extend the missional conversation and keep the movement alive, an examination of individual EQ and AQ is an essential next step.

A Scriptural Shift

The scriptural underpinnings of the missional movement rest primarily in the Great Commission: “Then Jesus came to [the disciples] and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”⁷² But two problems are confronting us as we try to live into Jesus’ commissioning: (1) We don’t fully believe in our own authority and ability to do what Jesus is asking of us, and (2) We don’t understand how to effectively speak to “all nations.” In other words, while our godly purpose may make sense to us intellectually, we are not properly equipped to live into it. As Mark Galli argues in *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God*, when we begin to rationalize Jesus, we render the Great Commission vacuous and ineffective:

⁷¹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It’s Impossible to be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006) 66.

⁷² Matt. 28:18-20.

We avoid the reality of Christ's power in a number of ways. For instance, we're tempted to spiritualize his power, to reduce the elemental potency and energy to a moment of personal religious inspiration. The stilling of the storm is about psychological storms in our lives. The healing of the lame is about solving emotional problems that cripple us. Jesus bringing sight to the blind is about God's ability to help us see our lives clearly. And so on and so forth. If we do that enough, we begin to think the Gospel stories are nothing but metaphors, and metaphors primarily about us."⁷³

How do we rescue Jesus' meaning "from the barnacles that have attached themselves to it over the centuries"?⁷⁴

As Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch argue in *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for Missional Church*, we need a recalibration – a reboot back to Jesus: "Christology is the key to the renewal of the church in every age and in every possible situation it might find itself."⁷⁵ In our effort to recalibrate, what if we ground ourselves in the Scripture that begins Jesus' ministry before we turn with confidence to the commission that ends it? When Jesus returns to Galilee after his time in the desert, we witness his first public act and a remarkable demonstration of his life's purpose:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,

⁷³ Mark Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 113.

⁷⁴ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 343.

⁷⁵ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 42.

to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”⁷⁶

While some theologians argue that this Sabbath message may not have been Jesus' inaugural sermon,⁷⁷ the content is more important than the chronology: First, Jesus grounds his words in Isaiah, Scripture that his audience already knew, trusted, and believed; rather than appealing to his audience with what they might consider his own wisdom, emotion, or story, Jesus relies on the truth of God's word to introduce him to those in attendance. Second, Jesus announces with confidence, using the prophet's poetry, that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed him. Jesus does not waver, question, or wonder; he knows who he is, and he steps forward boldly. Third, Jesus states that his God-given purpose is singular and simple: to proclaim the Gospel. Again, he does not waver, question, or wonder; God gave him a purpose, and he announces to the gathered listeners that his purpose is to proclaim to the poor the good news that he has come to offer. Fourth, Jesus articulates clearly the content of his purpose: to free the imprisoned and oppressed, to offer sight to the blind, and to usher in an ongoing Year of Jubilee. Jesus does not equivocate or justify; he boldly proclaims. Finally, Jesus announces that the Messianic prophecy he has just read aloud is his to fulfill in this very moment, an announcement that arouses anger and suspicion among his listeners.

If we are to step forward in this Scripture as a missional church, mindful and unshakeable in our knowledge that (1) we, too, have been anointed by the Lord, (2) our

⁷⁶ Luke 4:16-21.

⁷⁷ Laurence E. Porter, “Luke,” *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 1151.

purpose is to share the good news, and (3) we have come to free the oppressed and offer sight to the blind, how will we equip leaders to first locate and then maintain this kind of Jesus-inspired steadfast confidence? For more than a century, our understanding of human intelligence has been misled by our inability to articulate well an individual's capacity to function within emotional constructs – even though the Bible clearly acknowledges that God created us as emotional, relational beings. Since the 1990s, we have begun to see studies emerge that examine an individual's emotional quotient (EQ) rather than IQ in assessing potential job performance success. As we consider Jesus' reading in Luke 4, how might we use EQ assessment strategies to help guide missional leaders and disciples into the God-given confidence that Jesus embodies? As Andrew Farley writes in *The Naked Gospel*, Christianity now is seen as a cancer as often as it is seen as a crutch: "Many non-Christians whom I know have purposely opted not to contract the Christian disease," Farley writes. "Outsiders are growing wise to the fact that many Christians are dissatisfied with their church or their personal relationship with God. Their faith just isn't working for them anymore as they can't seem to maintain their end of the 'bargain' with God."⁷⁸ But what if the works-motivated "bargain" were eclipsed by emotional intelligence, purpose, and confidence?

As he moves into his ministry, Jesus offers us a supernatural example of perfect EQ. When confronted with a crisis, he does not ponder his own personal motivations, childhood scarring, long-held resentments, or misled assumptions. He does not tamp down his emotions with guilt or shame, trying to be something he is not. He does not question whether he is good enough, whether his purpose is clear enough, whether he will

⁷⁸ Andrew Farley, *The Naked Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 31.

appear to his audience precisely as he hopes to appear. Jesus is unfailingly focused on his Spirit-anointment, his good news, and his purpose. In addition to his flawless example of what EQ should be, Jesus demonstrates a remarkable Holy Spirit-guided sense of his audience. This third quotient is best described as an “audience quotient” (IQ → EQ → AQ), and in Jesus we see it exemplified perfectly. When the men lower the paralytic on a mat through the roof tiles, Jesus’ response is focused wholly on the men themselves: “When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’”⁷⁹ When Jesus sees Matthew at his tax booth, he does not ponder what those around him will think or whether Matthew will receive his words; instead, Jesus focuses his attention on Matthew and offers exactly what his disciple-to-be needs to hear: “‘Follow me,’ Jesus said to him.”⁸⁰ When Matthew holds a great banquet of tax collectors in his home and Jesus joins the feast, the Pharisees complained to the disciples, questioning Jesus’ allegiances. Jesus’ answer to them is neither defensive nor self-effacing. He focuses on the questioners themselves, offering an answer that is solely about his audience and the state of their hearts: “Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’”⁸¹ When Jesus meets the centurion and later the widow with her dead son, his compassion for those encounters is genuine, unencumbered, and Holy Spirit-guided.⁸² Other examples of Jesus’ perfect EQ and AQ include the following: Jesus’ time with John the Baptist,⁸³ his

⁷⁹ Luke 5:20.

⁸⁰ Luke 5:27.

⁸¹ Luke 5:31-32.

⁸² Luke 7:1-10, 11-17.

⁸³ Matt. 3:13-17.

forty days and nights in the desert,⁸⁴ his greeting of the first disciples,⁸⁵ his Sermon on the Mount,⁸⁶ his encounter with the man with leprosy,⁸⁷ his meeting with Peter's mother-in-law,⁸⁸ his reminder at the lake,⁸⁹ his healings of the demon-possessed men and the paralytic,⁹⁰ his commissioning of the twelve,⁹¹ and the brilliance of his parables.⁹² Even when he reprimands the Pharisees⁹³ and gently confronts Judas,⁹⁴ Jesus has a keen sense of both his own emotions and the ability of his audience to receive what he has to say.

As humans mired in complicated histories and worry about the future, the health of our relationships can be critical in affirming our sense of self, particularly if our EQ is underdeveloped: "We live in a culture that now prioritizes belonging over believing. Pastors and key leaders sense that they need to adjust their language in order to adapt to this cultural shift. The question is, 'How?'"⁹⁵ Joseph R. Myers asks in *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*. Jesus knew how. Jesus

⁸⁴ Matt. 4:11.

⁸⁵ Matt. 4:18-22.

⁸⁶ Matt. 5:1 – 7:29.

⁸⁷ Matt. 8:1-4.

⁸⁸ Matt. 8:14-17.

⁸⁹ Matt. 8:18-22.

⁹⁰ Matt. 8:28 – 9:8.

⁹¹ Matt. 10:1-42.

⁹² Matt. 13:1-58, 18:10-14, 20:1-16, 21:28, 22:1-14.

⁹³ Matt. 23:1-39.

⁹⁴ Matt. 26:23-25.

⁹⁵ Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 6.

knew how to set aside self and focus on the Father, to step forward with clarity and confidence, to hold fast to purpose, to articulate his own emotions and use them for good rather than confusion, to see and hear his audience in a way that was unfettered by self, to proclaim freedom for the oppressed and sight for the blind, to offer his listeners the word or deed that spoke to their soul, to hold steadfast to his God-given purpose in every crisis, challenge, and quandary. Part of our problem, John F. Haught suggests in *Resting on the Future*, is that our perspective is marred by a post-Enlightenment reliance on what is tangible and a post-modern skepticism that dismantles anything that smacks of the supernatural. But Haught argues that a new church movement must press for something more: “In a post-Copernican age, therefore, can the spiritual quest discover windows to perfection that may stir us anew to lift up our hearts? Are there any natural openings to a transcendent sacred reality that can explain our souls, heal our anxieties, and give us peace? In the age of science, is there any inspirational equivalent to the flawless heavens that in ages past pointed so palpably to the infinite?”⁹⁶ Jesus offers us himself; how can we recalibrate the church in such a way that we embrace, absorb, and embody his gift?

The Missional Movement: Twentieth-Century Intentions

While the missional movement was founded on good intentions, its definitions lack clarity – an ongoing omission that likely will lead to the movement’s demise. Consider J. Todd Billings’ call for a clearer articulation of purpose in his 2008 *Christianity Today* article titled “What Makes a Church Missional?”:

⁹⁶ John F. Haught, *Resting on the Future: Catholic Theology for an Unfinished Universe* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 44-45.

Some use *missional* to describe a church that rejects treating the gospel like a commodity for spiritual consumers; others frame it as a strategy for marketing the church and stimulating church growth. Some see the missional church as a refocusing on God's action in the world rather than obsessing over individuals' needs; others see it as an opportunity to "meet people where they are" and reinvent the church for postmodern culture. Clearly, we need to examine the range of perspectives hiding under the term *missional* if we're to make use of insights learned in the missional-church discussion.⁹⁷

Editor Darrell L. Guder's multi-authored 1998 volume titled *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* is typically considered the focal point from which today's definitions of "missional" have emerged. In *Missional Church*, we find a discussion of Christendom-focused Christianity, cultural privilege at play in the church, internal-focused church structure, *mission dei*, Lesslie Newbigin's missional focus, and a new emphasis on believers sent into the world to share the Gospel. Guder notes in Chapter 9 that the movement of this new church should be ever-outward: "The theological formation of the missional connectedness of the church should be centrifugal in nature," he argues.⁹⁸ But, as Sweet suggests in *Nudge*, the ecclesiastical Gospel model ideally should employ centripetal rather than centrifugal force, drawing people in to safety, relief, and renewal, rather than pressing unprepared disciples out into a world that is not ready for them.

In their book *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile attempt to bring clarity to the increasingly muddled definition of "missional." Their answer, generally speaking, is to allow the fluidity for a broader application in a variety of situations: "Some argue today ... that the word 'missional' has become

⁹⁷ J. Todd Billings, "What Makes a Church Missional?" *Christianity Today* 52, no. 3 (March 2008): 56, accessed April 22, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/march/16.56.html>.

⁹⁸ Guder, 249.

vacuous and has thus lost its definitional value. We are proposing a different argument in this book, namely, that ‘missional’ displays an inherent elasticity that allows it to be understood in a variety of ways.”⁹⁹ In *Introducing the Missional Church*, Roxburgh and Boren include a subheading that reads, “How the Missional Church Transcends Categorization.”¹⁰⁰ Roxburgh writes in his 2011 book *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* that part of the missional movement centers on a new way of seeing the world around us: “An important part of joining with God in mission-shaped life is learning to see again with fresh eyes, to wake up to the fresh and not-so-obvious ways God is present. How might we learn to see our neighborhood through God’s eyes and become detectives of God’s life in our neighbors and the activities of the streets where we live?”¹⁰¹ And in *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, Alan Hirsch argues that the church’s step “to the edge of chaos” may actually be a positive move:

There are signs of real movement going on. One of the more obvious signs is the sense of holy discontent among Christians of all ages and classes – it’s not just the younger generations that are asking questions. Even the boomers are asking, “Has it all come down to this? Attending church services, singing songs to God, and attending cell groups? Is this really what Christianity is all about?” But more disquieting perhaps is that there is a mass exodus from the church: remember the research of David Barrett and Todd Johnson that there are 111 million Christians without a local church in the world today. These people claim to take Jesus seriously but feel alienated from current expressions of church. We all know them, don’t we? My own experience tells me that there are more Christians aged twenty-something outside the church than inside the church at any given time. The statistics and premonitions must say something to us, and they are not unnecessarily gloomy. What they tell us is that there is a search going on. This

⁹⁹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Roxburgh and Boren, 49.

¹⁰¹ Roxburgh, 183.

search for alternatives is a sign that the system is responding, and it has led to significant experimentation, and eventually to some genuine innovation.¹⁰²

While I appreciate the authors' attempts to both articulate and explain the term "missional," particularly in light of a "mass exodus" from church and Hirsch's allusion to "genuine innovation," an intentional look at EQ and AQ is our best next step if we are to send disciples who are able to (re)sign Christianity in a way that eases the anti-Christendom sentiments reverberating throughout our post-church culture. What the missional movement has allowed is a recognition of our privileged position as we seek to follow the Great Commission. The advent of both the Google age and a post-Christian worldview, however, demand a new kind of conversation that is keenly direct, transparent, and genuine. As we encourage the missional movement, are we adequately preparing pastors and disciples for a twenty-first-century society that eschews muddled reasoning and hypocrisy even more than its predecessors?

The Missional Movement: Twenty-First-Century Application

My concern is that if we step more fully into the twenty-first-century continuing our discussions of clarity, defending our intentions and ideals but never really gaining any traction, Mike Breen's aptly titled 2011 article will come to fruition: "Why the Missional Movement Will Fail." Breen argues that the missional movement is repeating the doomed slide of so many previous efforts in the western church; while the ideals are admirable, the inner workings are not primed for traction: "They are a car without an engine," Breen writes. "A missional church or a missional community or a missional

¹⁰² Alan J. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 268.

small group is the new car that everyone is talking about right now, but no matter how beautiful or shiny the vehicle, without the engine, it won't go anywhere.”¹⁰³ Breen calls for more intentional discipleship training. Missional work sends people into a spiritual war zone, Breen argues, and without both a boot camp for training and a hospital for recovery, it's no wonder that the movement itself is spinning its wheels: “When we don't disciple people the way Jesus and the New Testament talked about, we are sending them out without armor, weapons or training. This is mass carnage waiting to happen. How can we be surprised that people burn out, quit and never want to return to the missional life (or the church)? How can we not expect people who will feel used and abused?”¹⁰⁴

In his foreword to Hirsch and Catchim's *The Permanent Revolution*, Guder acknowledges that the term “missional” gained popularity after the publication of his 1998 compilation *Missional Church* but quickly blew astray: “The term immediately became a cliché that today means everything or nothing.”¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, it is Breen who attempts to bring some clarity to the conversation by contributing a section to Hirsch and Catchim's 2012 book. In his introduction of the APEST ministries, Breen suggests that these ascension gifts are a means of clarifying New Testament language in a way that is accessible and assessable for contemporary ministry efforts. Breen defines the APEST ministries as follows:

- The *apostle* is tasked with the overall vigor, as well as extension of Christianity as a whole, primarily through direct mission and church planting. As the name itself suggests, it is the quintessentially missional

¹⁰³ Mike Breen, “Why the Missional Movement Will Fail,” *Verge*, September 14, 2011, accessed April 22, 2016, <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/14/mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Hirsch and Catchim, xv.

ministry, as “sentness” (Latin *mission*) is written into it (*apostello* = sent one).

- The *prophet* is called to maintain faithfulness to God among the people of God. Essentially prophets are guardians of the covenant relationship.
- The *evangelist* is the recruiter to the cause, the naturally infectious person who is able to enlist people into the movement by transmitting the gospel.
- The *shepherd* (pastor) is called to nurture spiritual development, maintain communal health, and engender loving community among the people of God.
- The *teacher* mediates wisdom and understanding. This philosophical type brings comprehensive understanding of the revelation bequeathed to the church.¹⁰⁶

Breen’s efforts here are laudable, but the conclusions in *The Permanent Revolution* echo the same circular searching for definition that we have seen since Guder’s *Missional Church*. If, for example, a prophet is called to maintain faithfulness, or an evangelist is “the naturally infectious person,” who will more precisely define these terms to prevent the infighting that invariably will follow? If we agree to divide into roles, who will decide who fits into which, and how will we heal the wounds of those who do not fit at all?

In books such as Jeff Vanderstelt’s *Saturate* and Kara Powell’s *Sticky Faith*, I see an earnest searching that should be fostered and affirmed – a searching not unlike that of the nonbeliever who pours his money into finite satisfactions or flits from relationship to relationship. If we are searching for *what*, our answer is Jesus; and if we are searching for *how*, our answer is the same: Jesus. In his book *Happy Church: Pursuing Radical Joy as the People of God*, Tim McConnell calls for joy: “God intends to make his promises come true, to create pockets of happy people in this world – people whose joy serves his

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8.

purposes for his glory.”¹⁰⁷ Yes, but how? In *It’s Not What You Think: Why Christianity Is About So Much More Than Going to Heaven When You Die*, Jefferson Bethke reminds us of the importance of a shared meal: “The reason table and intimacy and story and temple and Sabbath are so important is that they are relational. You can’t tell a story unless you have relationship with your listeners. You can’t have intimacy without another person. You can’t enjoy the power of the table unless other people are there.”¹⁰⁸ Yes, but how? Philip Yancey asks in *What Good is God?* what role faith can play in a world where tragedies confront us daily. In a chapter titled “I Wish I’d Known,” Yancey admits that he once had it all wrong: “I came to this school with a distorted image of God, as a frowning Supercop looking to squash anyone who might be having a good time. How wrong I was.”¹⁰⁹ When our view is muddled by the complexity of being human, we typically have taken our eyes off of the *what* and the *how* of Jesus. When Jesus stood up to read in the Nazareth synagogue at the onset of his ministry, he turned to his Old Testament foundation, he pronounced his anointment by the Spirit of the Lord, and he proclaimed his purpose. He did not equivocate because both his sense of self and his awareness of audience were exquisite. As John Ortberg writes in his foreword to Mark Labberton’s *The Dangerous Act of Worship*, the answer need not be complicated:

The prophet Micah said a long time ago that the divine requirements for human life are not rocket science: Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before your God. Worship is the humble walk. It is the knee-buckling, jaw-dropping acknowledgement of the gap between the creature and the Creator, the finite and the Infinite, the sinful and the Holy. It is the heart-rending, spirit-mending

¹⁰⁷ Tim McConnell, *Happy Church: Pursuing Radical Joy as the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁰⁸ Jefferson Bethke, *It’s Not What You Think: Why Christianity Is About So Much More Than Going to Heaven When You Die* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), 195.

¹⁰⁹ Yancey, 136.

gratitude and joy of those who have tasted the wonder that words like *redemption* can only hint at.¹¹⁰

The missional movement needs a recalibration back to the simplest answer: Jesus. If the life metaphor is a game of tag, as Sweet suggests in *Nudge*, a clear sense of self (EQ) and an empathetic understanding of audience (AQ) will free us to race around tagging others rather than standing frozen, waiting for something we cannot articulate. “Every Jesus tag offered freedom”.¹¹¹ Surely we are called to the same.

The Jesus Quotient

With the Great Commission in Jesus’ final bodily moments on the earth, we get the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant as well as an eternal focal point for the daily purpose of life. What a gift, what a blessing, and what a superhuman calling by which we are to mindfully live our days: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”¹¹² From the mountain where Jesus has asked his 11 remaining disciples to meet Him, Jesus begins his Great Commission with a reminder that He is imbued with “all authority in heaven and on earth.” Here we are drawn straight into C. S. Lewis’s famous trilemma: “You must make a choice. Either this

¹¹⁰ Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 9.

¹¹¹ Sweet, *Nudge*, 242.

¹¹² Matt. 28:17-20.

man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”¹¹³ The Son of God has spoken, and He is not, as Lewis suggests, “a great human teacher”; instead, in his final words, He is calling his 11 disciples and all future disciples to be just that: great human teachers of all that He has taught them. Jesus begins by reminding his disciples that He stands before them with heaven’s authority, and He closes with the assurance that He, the authority of heaven, will be with them always until the end of time. The pronouncements I hear in these few verses are humbling and profound: As disciples, we are called to be teachers, and as teachers, we carry within us the power, authority, and miracle of the Holy Spirit. Our purpose is clear, but how do we live into it fully and well as Christian leaders?

As Gordon T. Smith writes in *Courage & Calling*, our ability to live into who God has called us to be invariably comes down to a matter of courage: “Courage must be characterized by wisdom, moral integrity, gratitude, humility and patience. But the bottom line remains *courage*. ... Do we have the courage to be – the courage to be who we are and do what we are called to do?”¹¹⁴ I believe courage arises when two key components are articulated and assuaged: (1) our purpose and (2) our worthiness. As Linda A. Hill et al write in *Collective Genius*, a sense of purpose is what both brings people together and moves them forward, a concept that echoes the intentionality of

¹¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 56.

¹¹⁴ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage & Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 182.

Jesus' Great Commission: "Purpose is often misunderstood," Hill writes. "It is not *what* a group does but *why* it does what it does. It's not a goal but a reason – the reason it exists, the need it fulfills, and the assistance it bestows. It is the answer to the question every group should ask itself: If we disappeared today, how would the world be different tomorrow?"¹¹⁵ And yet, as Hill reminds us in a later chapter titled "Beyond Purpose," clarity of direction is not enough. In order to function with energy and creativity within our God-given purpose, we must first have a sense of awareness about ourselves and about those around us – an awareness, as Christian leaders, that mimics the supernatural awareness of Jesus Christ. As MaryKate Morse writes in *Making Room for Leadership*, when we are unaware, we are handicapped by our inability to see: "Awareness leads us to think about presence in a group. If you are aware of what you bring visually and viscerally into a group, and the amount of presence these markers generate, you can be more proactive in improving or moderating the use of influence and power. If the group as a whole is aware, the members can begin to discuss it. Awareness triggers a group's capacity to be Christlike."¹¹⁶

The Alan Hirsch-inspired concept of "missional church" is a mindful attempt to define our Great Commission-driven purpose in light of 21st-century western American secular assumptions. While the term "missional" has been obfuscated in the last decade into a general evangelical word whose purpose is vague and shifting, its original intent

¹¹⁵ Linda A. Hill et al, *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2014), 92.

¹¹⁶ MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 123.

was a return to the essential call of the church. Here is Hirsch's definition in his 2007 book *The Forgotten Ways*:

A missional church is a church that defines itself and organizes its life around its real purpose as an agent of God's mission to the world. In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission. Therefore when the church is in mission, it is the true church. The church itself is not only a product of that mission but is obligated and destined to extend it by whatever means possible. The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus.¹¹⁷

When the semantics slide, as has happened with the concept of "missional church," the sense of purpose tends to slide as well. Is it possible to regain the purpose of the missional movement and press it into a new realm that is both meaningful and applied, rather than merely theoretical and too often misconstrued?

A current trend in both secular business leadership and in behavioral studies is the concept of "Emotional Intelligence" or "Emotional Quotient" (EQ) popularized in Daniel Goleman's 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence*. Goleman acknowledges that his work draws into a single forum more than a decade of scientific study that preceded his book, demonstrating an increasing interest in the role our emotions play in who we are and how we behave. In *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman walks his readers through the neurobiological data and brain-imaging technologies of the 1980s and 1990s that introduced scientific credence to the flood of self-help books wallowing in the perplexities of love, anger, and sorrow, for example. As Goleman writes in his opening pages, the question is whether IQ is stagnant and one's life path is genetically fixed: "What can we change that will help our children fare better in life?" he asks. "What factors are at play, for example, when people of high IQ flounder and those of modest IQ do surprisingly well? The

¹¹⁷ Hirsch, 285.

difference quite often lies in the abilities called here *emotional intelligence*, which includes self-control, zeal and persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself.”¹¹⁸ Where are theologians and Christian leaders in this exploration of EQ? Where are the New Testament scholars ready to draw parallels between the tenets of EQ and the characteristics of Jesus Christ?

The larger question I see at play is this: If we are called to be teachers for Christ, telling others of the wisdom and hope of the Gospel as we create safe places for them to listen and receive well, how can we ensure that (1) our purpose is clear and current, and (2) our self-awareness is thorough enough to bely our need to waste emotional energy pondering our own path and effect on the world, and instead focus on those around us who need this kind of encouragement in order to live Kingdom lives? How do we take “EQ” and draw it in to the ecclesiastical realm, and how do we take “missional” and fit it into the secular realm? Is it possible that the path we need to explore leads us from IQ to EQ to AQ, a new quotient that points us directly to our Audience Quotient, just as Jesus’ natural, all-consuming empathy for others defined the way that He presented himself in nearly every instance in the Gospels?

From IQ to EQ

Jesus embodied the intelligence we seek: “It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”¹¹⁹ We see Christ’s wisdom most overtly in the Gospels, where

¹¹⁸ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), xii.

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor. 1:30.

the Jews question the source of His intelligence: “Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, ‘How did this man get such learning without having studied?’ Jesus answered, ‘My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.’”¹²⁰ How curious, then, that even Christian leaders seek wisdom through a post-modern survey of evidence rather than turning to the source of all wisdom. The concept of IQ has been in existence since psychologist William Stern first introduced the standardized tests in the early twentieth century; before Stern’s contributions, human intelligence was measured through observation and other less-exact mechanisms. Since Stern’s book first introduced the German word “Intelligenzquotient,” psychologists have developed a number of related IQ tests and standards, seeking to measure the elasticity, adaptability, creativity, and speed of the human brain as precisely as possible. In her book *Changing Signs of Truth*, Crystal L. Downing acknowledges that Christ’s wisdom is present and active: “[I]f we genuinely believe that the Holy Spirit still moves among God’s people, we should believe that the Spirit enables us to identify truths that transcend the biblical inconsistencies identified by C. S. Lewis and the manuscript errors identified by Bart Ehrman,” Downing writes. “Nowhere does the Bible proclaim its own scientific inerrancy, but everywhere it demonstrates the (re)signing of truth.”¹²¹

Popular self-help-type books still boast simple formulas for exercising the brain to higher IQ scores. Consider the current top five IQ books on Amazon.com: *The Complete Book of Intelligence Tests: 500 Exercises to Improve, Upgrade, and Enhance Your Mind*

¹²⁰ John 7:14-16.

¹²¹ Downing, 83.

Strength by Philip Carter; *Your Miracle Brain: Maximize Your Brainpower, Boost Your Memory, Life Your Mood, Improve Your IQ and Creativity* by Jean Carper; *1000 Hard Word Search Puzzles to Improve Your IQ* by Kalman Toth; *IQ Baby – Facts and Tips to Improve the IQ of Your Child: From Conception to School* by Gabriel Morales and Dr. Julie Harvard; and *50 Picture Puzzles to Improve Your IQ* by Kalman Toth. Interestingly, however, current business theory has begun to step away from individual IQ toward a recognition that collaborative group work is far more creative and productive than the inspirations of a single individual. Consider the words of Linda A. Hill et al. in *Collective Genius*, for example: “Innovative companies value collaboration and take conscious, proactive steps to build it into the way they work. They understand that the best, most innovative work happens when diverse people interact closely and integrate their ideas. They know individuals working by themselves can only take an idea or project so far.”¹²² This emphasis on shared intelligence as superior to individual wisdom is antithetical to the self-reliant western American ideal, and yet its internet-inspired foundation is both notable and enduring; why not share ideas and move further faster in our increasingly capitalist world when the internet promotes sharing that is instantaneous and no longer geographically constrained? The shift is both counter-cultural and biblical.

As Harvard MBA-inspired business theories are beginning to focus more on group work than on individual IQ, so, too, are the case studies that emerge. In books such as Kerry Patterson et al.’s *Crucial Conversations*, the organizational matrix is shifting from an individual’s climb up the corporate ladder to a rather befuddled realization that we should find better ways to relate to one another: “Despite the importance of crucial conversations, we often back away from them because we fear we’ll make matters worse.

¹²² Hill et al, *Collective Genius*, 103.

We've become masters at avoiding tough conversations. ... But it doesn't have to be this way. If you know how to handle crucial conversations, you can effectively hold tough conversations about virtually any topic."¹²³ The upward climb boasts a control that is lost when one begins to rely on others for growth and progression. In the close of *The Silo Effect*, Tett calls the messiness of reaching outside of the safety of one's own experience "The Curse of Efficiency": "Letting people 'roam' in an undirected way tends to seem like a self-indulgent luxury. So is the idea of creating cultural translators, conducting social analysis, or – dare I say it – looking at life through an anthropologist's lens. There is a constant tendency for people to organize themselves into silos in the name of hyper efficiency, accountability, and effectiveness."¹²⁴ But if we are to step boldly away from an emphasis on individual IQ and into the world of relationships, how do we quantify whether we are doing it effectively or assess how we might improve? Here is where we find the shift from IQ to EQ.

As Reuven Bar-On and Rich Handley write in *Optimizing People*, our assumptions about human intelligence for the past century have been misled by our inability to articulate and measure an individual's capacity to function well within the constructs of emotional, personal, and social understanding. Bar-On differentiates between cognitive intelligence and non-cognitive intelligence, acknowledging that the latter is in need of more specifically defined operational models in order for us to accurately measure one person against another.¹²⁵ But since the 1990s, Bar-On writes, we

¹²³ Kerry Patterson et al, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2012), 3.

¹²⁴ Tett, 254.

have begun to see studies emerge that suggest the necessity of gauging EQ rather than IQ when predicting successful job performance. Bar-On points to a 1998 study by a graduate psychology student that affirms a direct correlation between high EQ and high job performance, as well as an insignificant correlation between high IQ and high job performance: “[T]his is the first scientific study that has proven that EQ is more important than IQ. This shows that the truly intelligent human being is one who is not only *cogtelligent* (cognitively intelligent) but *emtelligent* (emotionally and socially intelligent) as well.”¹²⁶

In a similar quest to differentiate cognitive intelligence from emotional intelligence, Goleman points to trends in the study of psychology. In the mid-twentieth century, behaviorists such as B. F. Skinner insisted on a modernist understanding of reality: The only behaviors that can be studied with scientifically acceptable objectivity are those behaviors that are visible to an observer. Cognitive scientists in the 1960s opened the studies to such inobservable elements as the nature of intelligence and the pathways by which the brain stores and retrieves information, “but emotions were still off-limits,” Goleman writes: “Conventional wisdom among cognitive scientists held that intelligence entails a cold, hard-nosed processing of fact. It is hyperrational, rather like *Star Trek’s* Mr. Spock, the archetype of dry information bytes unmuddled by feeling, embodying the idea that emotions have no place in intelligence and only muddle our picture of mental life.”¹²⁷ Using more affirming semantics than Bar-On, Goleman

¹²⁵ Reuven Bar-on and Rich Handley, *Optimizing People* (New Braunfels, TX: Pro-Philes Press 1999), 2.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁷ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 40.

differentiates between cognitive understanding and meta-cognitive understanding, arguing that emotional and relational abilities are critical, measurable factors of human intelligence. Continuing his science fiction analogy, Goleman reminds his readers of the Spock-like character Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, a character who recognizes that his own inability to fully experience human emotions is a detriment to his quality of life not just as a relational being but as an intelligent, progressive decision-maker as well; logic alone is not enough to lead one to the best human solution:

Our humanity is most evident in our feelings; Data seeks to feel, knowing that something essential is missing. He wants friendship, loyalty; like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*, he lacks a heart. Lacking the lyrical sense that feeling brings, Data can play music or write poetry with technical virtuosity, but not feel its passion. The lesson of Data's yearning for yearning itself is that the higher values of the human heart – faith, hope, devotion, love – are missing entirely from the coldly cognitive view. Emotions enrich; a model of mind that leaves them out is impoverished.¹²⁸

Note the echoes of biblical longings here in Goleman's reference to "the higher values of the human heart": "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."¹²⁹ As pastors and church leaders, how have we neglected to recognize the enormity of this shift in the field of psychology from cognitive to metacognitive? Are we so caught up in bemoaning the skepticism of post-modern thought that we have missed an opportunity to agree with this new cultural standard of articulating and measuring relationships, affirming an inner longing that every individual has for relationship?¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹²⁹ 1 Cor. 13:13.

¹³⁰ Isa. 26:9, Ps. 119:20, Ps. 73:25, Ps. 42:2, Ps. 63:1, Ps. 143:6, John 6:35, John 7:37, Rev. 22:17.

From EQ to AQ

As Leonard Sweet writes in *From Tablet to Table*, true relationship demands far more than mere tolerance: “We don’t love our neighbors merely by not bothering them or by doing nothing bad to them. We love our neighbors when we reach out to them, when we listen to them, when we ‘give them something to eat’ (Matthew 14:16).”¹³¹ And when we enter fully into relationship, willingly and lovingly helping those around us, we are not called to defend or admonish, as both the secular and evangelical world might suggest. Instead, Sweet argues, we are to be humble, recognizing the need for silence as we seek truth together: “Disciples of Jesus who return from the mission field are like soldiers who return from the battlefield. The experiences makes them not louder but quieter; they don’t pontificate, but stay humble, silent, considering when to leave things unsaid and when to simply listen to others.”¹³² But the ability to sit comfortably with silence and in humility arises from a self-awareness and maturity that does not come easily for most; what then? Consider it another way: Behavioral scientists agree that IQ is measurable and mostly immutable over the course of a lifetime; in other words, despite the self-help books that proclaim otherwise, IQ is a biological measure of intelligence that is difficult to change in any discernable way. But what about EQ? Once we agree on the assessment tools, is it possible for an individual to isolate EQ factors that he or she would like to improve, striving for a higher level of EQ?

Bar-On and Handley argue that self-assessment and improvement are key goals of any emotional audit. Bar-On defines emotional intelligence as “an array of emotional,

¹³¹ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavSprings, 2014), 138.

¹³² Ibid., 126-127.

personal, and social abilities and skills that influence one's overall ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures,"¹³³ and he lists the following emotional and social abilities as the factorial components of the "Bar-On Model":

- **Intrapersonal Components:**
 Self-Regard
 Emotional Self-Awareness
 Assertiveness
 Self-Actualization
- **Interpersonal Components:**
 Empathy
 Social Responsibility
 Interpersonal Relationship
- **Stress Management Components:**
 Stress Tolerance
 Impulse Control
 Independence
- **Adaptability Components:**
 Reality Testing
 Flexibility
 Problem Solving
- **General Mood Components:**
 Optimism
 Happiness¹³⁴

Bar-On and Handley use the bulk of their 1999 book to elucidate these fifteen social and relational skills, defining them further and offering suggestions for improvement both for an individual and in a group setting. What is now known as the "Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory" is only one of many tools for measuring Emotional Intelligence. Other assessment tools include the Emotional & Social Competence Inventory, the Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory, the Group Emotional Competency Inventory, the

¹³³ Bar-On and Handley, 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Mayer-Salovey-Caruso EI Test (MSCEIT), the Schutte Self Report EI Test, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), the Work Group Emotional Intelligence Profile, and Wong's Emotional Intelligence Scale. Each of these emotional intelligence assessment measures is intended to inspire self-reflection and provide practical suggestions for improvement, and it interests me that neither the Christian academic world nor the evangelical church has embraced the usefulness of these measures in assessing effective leadership. As universities nationwide bicker over the cross-purposes of administrators and faculty members, what effect might heightened Emotional Intelligence have on both sides of the equation? As students enter the classroom burdened by insecurities and anxieties, how might a professor who is highly Emotional Intelligent be more successful in creating a safe place for that student to unburden, listen well, and transform? As churches seek to share the Gospel in new and inviting ways, how might it improve their effectiveness to have pastors, elders, and teachers who have high EQ ratings and are able to relate to one another and to the greater public in ways that are remarkably genuine, humble, consistent, and transparent?

As Roxburgh and Boren write in *Introducing the Missional Church*, the evangelical effort to reach a broader population is both pervasive and admirable, particularly in light of changing social and political sensibilities: "The missional conversation has entered almost every stream of the church," Roxburgh and Boren argue. "The Spirit of God is moving in the church in creative, generative ways that call the people of God to engage their neighborhoods and display God's kingdom in everyday life. ... Large churches are empowering people to listen to what God is doing outside the church buildings and blessing them to follow God's leading without having to call it a

ministry of that church.”¹³⁵ As churches are “empowering people to listen to what God is doing outside the church buildings,” are they empowering people to both hear themselves well (IQ→EQ) and hear others well (EQ→AQ)? Sweet broaches this idea with his reference to “Peter the Ear” in *Nudge*:

Peter didn’t get his name changed to “the Rock” until after he proved he could be an ear-witness and he had listened to what the people were saying. *Simon* is a form of *Simeon*, which in Hebrew means “hearing.” In Hebrew custom this meant Simon was “one who hears God” or even “one whom God has heard.” Because he listened to what the people were saying, while at the same time was the first to confess Jesus as “the Son of the living God,” Simon the Ear became Peter the Rock.¹³⁶

God places enormous value on listening well, a skill that functions as a measure of both self-confidence (a clearly articulated sense of purpose) and EQ, and Jesus was our optimal example. Consider, for example, Jesus’ exchange with the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar. In a culturally explosive situation where most people would be so caught up in their own inner dialogue that effective listening would be an enormous struggle, Jesus listens, He questions, He suggests, He forgives, and He loves.¹³⁷ Someone mired by personal insecurities or the emotional backdrop of that moment would never have been able to both listen and affect that woman’s life as Jesus did.

While I am suggesting the church and university leaders alike recognize the importance of Emotional Intelligence, I see a greater example in Jesus that must be our ultimate aspiration. Jesus did not ponder IQ or EQ. He knew His God-given purpose and His own emotional character so deeply that He was able to operate out of those foundations without pausing to ponder His alignment and next best step. Much as IQ has

¹³⁵ Roxburgh and Boren, 52.

¹³⁶ Sweet, *Nudge*, 158.

¹³⁷ John 4:4-26.

transcended to EQ in recent years, Jesus' example presses us to master EQ handily enough that we can step into a third quotient, a Jesus quotient, that is best referred to as AQ, or "Audience Quotient." As EQ calls us to name and consider the human emotions that influence our every move, AQ asks that we focus every ounce of who we are on the audience before us: measuring their emotional reactions, hearing their story, gauging their nonverbals, and considering what will help them to grow. In his book *What Good is God?* Philip Yancey calls for a more Christ-like approach than mere culture-bashing and judgment: "We in twentieth-century America need not obsessively wring our hands over what offends us in the broader culture. Instead ... we can refuse to believe the lies broadcast on the big screen. We can insist that a person's worth is not determined by his appearance or her income, or by ethnic background or even citizenship status, but rather is a sacred, inviolable gift from God."¹³⁸ But in order to insist on the inviolable God-given value of a person's worth, we must be able to see that person with Christ-like transparency, fully in control of our own EQ to a degree that we give it no more thought than the intake and outflow of our own breath.

AQ is our ability to focus fully on another: to love as we have been loved, to see as we are seen, and to teach and disciple as Jesus taught us to do. If we are mired in worldly worries or unable to articulate the truth of who we are and how we are called to live life well, we cannot expect to see our audience with the love and fierce purpose that Jesus did. But isn't this precisely what the Great Commission calls us to do? Shouldn't our personal mission statement align with Jesus' commission and example of how we are to live a missional life well? As Farley writes in *The Naked Gospel*, "You don't have to

¹³⁸ Yancey, 191.

succumb to the paralysis of analysis. Christ is in you, and you are in Christ.”¹³⁹ How, then, do we train university and church leaders to transcend from IQ to EQ to AQ, aspiring to a Jesus Quotient that aligns with the Great Commission in ways that will help us to (re)sign the church¹⁴⁰ as a safe place for renewal, energy, peace, and joy, rather than the hypocrisy and judgmentalism that has maligned its name for generations?

¹³⁹ Farley, 213.

¹⁴⁰ Downing, 55-56.

SECTION 4:

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The Jesus Quotient is written to extend the conversation surrounding Tim Keller's idea of a missional church.¹⁴¹ If we are called to actively bring the Gospel into the world rather than waiting passively in pews, how do we assess the impact we are having? What linguistic traps can we identify where our twenty-first-century postmodern mindset has absorbed biblical truths, rewriting them into erroneous mythologies that prevent effective communication? What specific words and phrases are triggers of negativity, and how can we work to acknowledge and rewrite those archetypal traps? As we step forward as a missional church, how do we ensure that those we encounter feel safe to listen and engage? How do we ensure that we, as leaders, have the emotional maturity necessary to see others as Christ would see, rather than through a lens of past hurts, defensiveness, or erroneous motivations?

In his 2001 essay "The Missional Church," Keller argues that as western "Christendom" declines, the American church will lost its ground: "Most traditional evangelical churches still can only win people to Christ who are temperamentally traditional and conservative. But ... this is a 'shrinking market.' And eventually evangelical churches ensconced in the declining, remaining enclaves of 'Christendom' will have to learn how to become 'missional.' If it does not do that, it will decline or die."¹⁴² In his 2006 book *The Forgotten Ways*, Hirsch writes, "If evangelizing and discipling the nations lie at the heart of the church's purpose in the world, then it is

¹⁴¹ Keller.

¹⁴² Ibid.

mission, and not ministry, that is the true organizing principle of the church.”¹⁴³ In the 1998 book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending Church in North America*, Darrell L. Guder and his team argue that it is not just a worldview shift but a change in our relationships with one another: “We live increasingly in a post-Christian society, or what might better be labeled a post-churched culture. Either way, it is clear that the relationship of the churches to the social order has undergone profound change.”¹⁴⁴ We have recognized for the past two decades that our focus in a postmodern culture must be outward rather than inward, mission-directed rather than program-driven, and yet we are still befuddled twenty years later by how to do this successfully. Roxburgh and Boren argue that while the missional conversation is refreshing and exciting, few churches truly want to change: “This missional journey calls us out onto a new kind of river that none of us know how to navigate, because it challenges the core of our church imaginations.”¹⁴⁵

In January of 2012, more than 2,200 Presbyterians at a conference in Orlando, Florida, voted to create a new denomination called ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Six years later, ECO now boasts more than 60,000 members and 358 congregations nationwide.¹⁴⁶ Members of ECO have all experienced pain akin to divorce – some seven or more years ago, and some far more recently. Such pain demands safety, particularly among pastors who have faced come-to-Jesus moments when their congregations, physical church facilities, and reputations could and may have been stripped away in the process of exiting the PC(USA). As a new denomination, ECO is in

¹⁴³ Hirsch, 235-236.

¹⁴⁴ Guder, 55.

¹⁴⁵ Roxburgh and Boren, 49.

¹⁴⁶ *ECO Presbyterian*, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://eco-pres.org/>.

a prime seat for tackling the challenge of embracing the mission movement in practical, applicable, and meaningful twenty-first-century ways. In the epilogue to his 2014 book *Growing Local Missionaries: Equipping Churches to Sow Shalom in Their Own Cultural Backyard*, Dan Steigerwald reminds us that the ecclesiastical mindset shift must be about relationships more than anything else:

I believe God is calling Christians everywhere – in their own self-discerned way(s) and consistent with the rhythms most complementary to their design and context – to practice a missionary lifestyle. This is not a part of Christian formation that we can give token attention to, while farming most of it out to the few professional missionaries, apostles, and evangelists in our midst. Rather, it involves each of us embracing a new identity and owning our personal and collective missionary vocation as agents of shalom.¹⁴⁷

Because ECO is a denomination founded on the pain of a relational schism, one of its primary conversations must be about carefully articulating and living into a new identity and new relationships. When we draw our definitions from the past, rather than stepping more fully into the progressive mindset we pronounce, echoes of the schism remain. As we find ways to more closely define what it means to be a missional denomination in a post-church era, we will heal ourselves and evangelize others in a way that runs far deeper and sticks far better than mere rhetoric.

The Jesus Quotient is inspired in part by my membership in the ECO denomination. As a Presbyterian with heritage that runs twenty-five generations back to Scotland and John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, I was first ordained as a ruling elder in 2005. I served for six years at our home church in Colorado, helping to walk our church through a difficult transition from the PC(USA) to the EPC in 2007. I am in the midst of my fifth year as ruling elder at our home church in Oregon, a

¹⁴⁷ Dan Steigerwald, *Growing Local Missionaries: Equipping Churches to Sow Shalom in Their Own Cultural Backyard* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publishers, 2014), 81.

position that also involved a difficult exit from the PC(USA), this time to the newly established ECO denomination. At the urging of friends and other pastors, I was interviewed by an ECO ordination team at a March 2015 Presbytery of the Northwest gathering in Maple Valley, Washington. I then submitted a written application for ordained pastoral ministry, joined a peer review group of other ECO pastors, gathered an intentional discernment group, and completed a full-day psychological evaluation. I was formally accepted as a candidate for ordination in the fall of 2015, and I attempted the four-part ordination exams in January 2016. After finding myself encouraged and affirmed by a denomination seeking bivocational pastors, I was surprised by a Bible Content Exam that demanded high levels of rote memorization. When I chose to remove myself from the exam process in early 2016, the head of the Pastoral Ministry Ordination Team encouraged me to remain a candidate for ordination and suggested I memorize the top 200 Bible verses on Google and attempt the exam again. As someone who has witnessed countless nonbelievers who refuse to engage with a faith defined by judgmentalism and hypocrisy, someone who also has been deeply hurt by the church in the past, and an educator who has spent a career favoring higher-level Bloom's Taxonomy learning¹⁴⁸ over the basic lower levels, I was disappointed in a process that relied on past patterns rather than pressing boldly forward. I remain a candidate for ordination, but I have put the process on hold as I complete this dissertation.

ECO is a denomination seeking to couple the missional directive with something more meaningful but difficult to articulate. While the build-it-and-they-will-come

¹⁴⁸ American psychologist Benjamin Bloom (1913-1999) developed a classification of learning objectives in the 1950s that has become foundational in the field of educational psychology. Known as "Bloom's Taxonomy," the model organizes thinking skills in six levels, from the basic to the more complex.

approach of the 1970s and 1980s is clearly considered passé, the missional focus on God's sent people does not seem to be bringing nonbelievers to faith as we had hope it might. What more is needed? How do we encourage, train, and gather disciples in a postmodern culture that eschews Christianity? How do we move beyond a Bible Content Exam that focuses on old school rote memorization and instead seek to train, mentor, and assess the Emotional Quotient and Audience Quotient of pastors and other church leaders who will be daily engaging with people who need to be heard clearly and well? *The Jesus Quotient* attempts to answer these questions in a way that is mindful of current dialogue but also cognizant of the cultural trends that are carrying us full-tilt into a Google-influenced twenty-first-century future. As Leonard Sweet writes in *Aqua Church 2.0*,

In a world where change is permanent, one has to be prepared to unlearn everything and begin all over again in the course of a lifetime. ... Leaders must settle for nothing but the latest intelligence, the best information. But leaders must also realize that information is perishable. If learning is at base "making sense of things," then we may need to unlearn some things so that we can make sense of things like never before.¹⁴⁹

The Jesus Quotient encourages us to unlearn and learn again.

While the core audience for *The Jesus Quotient* includes synod leadership, pastors, bivocational pastors, and leaders in the ECO Presbyterian denomination, my hope is that it will be useful for pastors and leaders in a number of Christian denominations and universities. I believe that a book that brings together definitions, current discussions, and prevailing concerns, coupled with practical tools for assessment, will be appealing to Christians in a variety of venues. As Jesus commands us to love one

¹⁴⁹ Leonard Sweet, *Aqua Church 2.0: Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1999), 307.

another as we are loved by Him,¹⁵⁰ we must learn to listen with an intentionality and humility that belies social media currency – regardless of denomination, affiliation, or standing.

The book would reach the widest audience if presented in both eBook and print formats. I have organized its content into ten sections:

- Preface
- Chapter 1: A 21st-Century Problem
- Chapter 2: The 20th-Century Answer
- Chapter 3: A 21st-Century Sensibility
- Chapter 4: The Intelligence Quotient (IQ)
- Chapter 5: The Emotional Quotient (EQ)
- Chapter 6: The Audience Quotient (AQ)
- Chapter 7: The Future Church
- Chapter 8: AQ Assessment Tools
- Conclusion

The preface will open with my own personal story of trust and betrayal in the church, a story that I often share in my classrooms as a means of acknowledging a common reality and establishing trust. The first chapter will dig more deeply into current secular opinions about Christianity, the language that restricts us, and the erroneous mythologies that will be challenging to step beyond. Chapter two acknowledges the efforts of the church in recent decades, particularly in light of the missional movement, but suggests ways that these efforts have not spoken to so many whose ideas of Jesus are informed by nonbiblical secular stories. The crux of the book comes in the third chapter, where I will examine Jesus' example in the Gospels, considering his deep empathy and strength of character. Chapter four will cover a brief history of the IQ assessment, including the psychological baggage that often accompanies those who believe they do not measure up as well as those who hold their results too high. In chapter five, we will look at the

¹⁵⁰ John 13:34.

origins and rise of the Emotional Quotient, particularly its popularity in the business world and its clear applicability to church and university-level leadership as well. Chapter six will define a new concept of Audience Quotient, gleaned from Jesus' example in the third chapter, and discuss its necessity in a Google era where social media and filter bubbles have begin to inform our realities. Chapter seven will look to the future church and the relevance of an IQ → EQ → AQ emphasis, and the eighth chapter will provide practical assessment tools. The conclusion will close with stories of AQ engagement and success, demonstrating for readers the need for this new tool in our twenty-first-century post-church culture.

SECTION 5:
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

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January 10, 2018

Dear Editor,

I am writing to introduce you to *The Jesus Quotient: IQ → EQ → AQ*, a nonfiction book intended to inspire pastors and other Christian leaders to develop a Jesus-inspired empathy for those they seek to minister to. At roughly 90,000 words, *The Jesus Quotient* is the result of more than 20 years of university-level teaching and church leadership.

As he embarked on his years of ministry, Jesus did not ponder IQ or EQ. He knew His God-given purpose and His own emotional character so deeply that He was able to operate out of those foundations without pausing to mull His alignment and next best step. Jesus' example presses pastoral and bivocational Christian leaders to master EQ handily enough that we can step into a third quotient, a Jesus quotient best described as "AQ" or "Audience Quotient." As EQ calls us to name and consider the human emotions that influence our every move, AQ asks that we focus every ounce of who we are on the audience before us: measuring their emotional reactions, hearing their stories, gauging their nonverbals, and considering what will help them to grow. How do we train pastors and church leaders to transcend from IQ to EQ to AQ, aspiring to a Jesus Quotient that will redefine the church as a safe place for renewal, energy, peace, and joy? *The Jesus Quotient* explores the incarnational qualities of EQ and AQ, and offers tools to assess and mentor pastors and leaders in both areas.

I am an English professor at George Fox University in Portland, Oregon, with a PhD in English from the University of Denver, an MFA in creative writing from Colorado State University, and a BA in journalism from Pacific Lutheran University. I am currently completing a second doctorate degree through the Portland Seminary at GFU: a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in Semiotics and Future Studies. I have published more than 100 book reviews and critical essays, I most recently published the open textbook *The Simple Math of Writing Well: Writing for the 21st Century* (2018), and my book *Angling for Repose: Wallace Stegner and the De-Mythologizing of the American West* was published in 2010. I also have published children's books with both Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press.

In addition to my academic work experience, I am a fiction writer, a former journalist, and a candidate for ordination in the Presbyterian Church. My family and I are active at our home church, where I preach occasionally and serve as a ruling elder.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Dr. Jennie A. Harrop

Track 02 Artifact
Book Proposal Template – Non-Fiction

Title: *The Jesus Quotient: IQ → EQ → AQ*

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Hook: Jesus did not ponder IQ or EQ; He knew His God-given purpose and emotional character so deeply that He was able to operate out of those foundations without pausing to consider His alignment or next best step. How do we train leaders who are equally grounded in IQ and EQ, allowing them to focus more fully on AQ (“Audience Quotient”), which is the ability to hear others well and love as we have been loved?

Overview: As leaders in the church, our capacity to hear is often muddled by an inability to acknowledge our own insecurities, insufficiencies, and emotions. *The Jesus Quotient* explores Jesus’ infallible emotional quotient (EQ) and audience quotient (AQ), seeking tools to assess and mentor effective leaders.

Purpose: To be an effective twenty-first-century missional movement, the church needs an intentional articulation of EQ and AQ, and assessment tools for both. *The Jesus Quotient* will provide pastoral and bivocational church leaders with the following:

- A discussion of twenty-first-century challenges and ineffective twentieth-century attempts to alleviate those challenges.
- A history and definition of IQ.
- A history and definition of EQ, including its relevance to church leadership.
- A definition and discussion of AQ, particularly as it relates to Jesus’ incarnational example.
- A look ahead to future considerations.
- AQ assessment tools for use by church and denominational leaders.

Promotion and Marketing: *The Jesus Quotient* could be marketed online and through Christian booksellers, targeting church and university pastors and leaders. It could be promoted at denominational conferences such as the ECO National Gathering and the PC(USA) General Assembly, and marketed through online venues such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a potential Jesus Quotient webpage. The author has submitted the idea as a presentation topic for the 2018 National Women in Leadership conference at the Harvard Faculty Club, and she will watch for additional speaking opportunities and potential conference proposals.

Competition:

- *The Emotional Intelligence of Jesus: Relational Smarts for Religious Leaders*, Roy M. Oswald, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015. A look at the emotional intelligence of Jesus and how it might be applied to the ministry of today's faith leaders.
- *Emotional Intelligence for the Christian: How It Radically Affects Your Happiness, Health, Success, and Effectiveness for Christ. How to Achieve It Where It Counts Most*, M. Blaine Smith, SilverCrest Books, 2012. A look at what emotional intelligence is and why it is vital for Christians.
- *Emotional Intelligence and the Church*, Rupert Hayles, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2012. A consideration of how critical emotional intelligence is to the health of the church.
- *Biblical EQ: Principles for Becoming an Emotionally Intelligent Christian*, John Edminston, BookSurge Publishing, 270. A step-by-step walk through emotion intelligence, beginning with basic physical responses and moving into more complex subconscious emotional reactions.

Uniqueness: While a handful of books have attempted to bring EQ into the ecclesiastical world, *The Jesus Quotient* is the first to suggest the concept of "Audience Quotient" or "AQ."

Potential Endorsements:

- Dr. Leonard Sweet
- Dr. Roger Nam
- Dr. Dana Allin
- Dr. Melanie Mock

Book Format: Softcover print book and ebook.

Chapter Outline:**Introduction**

The introduction will open with a personal story about how the church can cause harm, drawing readers into the topic with a raw combination of humility and alarm.

Chapter 1: A 21st-Century Problem

The first chapter will elucidate the problem further, offering additional examples of pharisaical hypocrisy, simple-mindedness, and judgmentalism as seen through the eyes of a postmodern, primarily nonbelieving western American culture.

Chapter 2: The 20th-Century Answer

The second chapter will define and discuss the missional church movement: its intentions, foundations, and misappropriations.

Chapter 3: A 21st-Century Sensibility

Chapter three will look to Jesus' incarnational example, examining stories from the Gospels as Jesus encounters individuals, small groups, and large crowds, exhibiting his perfect IQ, EQ, and AQ in every instance.

Chapter 4: The Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

The fourth chapter will summarize a brief history of the IQ assessment, including its benefits, limitations, and psychological ramifications.

Chapter 5: The Emotional Quotient (EQ)

The fifth chapter will look at the origins and rise of emotional intelligence, examining its popularity in the secular workplace and considering its application among leaders in the church and in Christian universities.

Chapter 6: The Audience Quotient (AQ)

The sixth chapter will define and discuss the new phrase "Audience Quotient," relying on Jesus' example as its foundation and moving forward into a look at how twenty-first-century Christian leaders might benefit from an AQ self-analysis.

Chapter 7: The Future Church

In chapter seven, the author will look to future directions of the church in an era of social media, an increasingly global economy, and unprecedented demands of high efficiency. What role can EQ and AQ play in the Christian church as leaders enter more fully into a wounded, unchurched society?

Chapter 8: AQ Assessment Tools

Chapter eight will offer practical assessments for denominational, church, and university use.

Conclusion:

In the conclusion, the author will close the discussion with several stories of AQ success, encouraging readers to embrace this new tool as a helpful means of speaking truth, love, peace, and hope into a broken culture.

Intended Readers:

- **Primary audience:** The 500+ pastors who have joined ECO or who are candidates for nomination.
- **Secondary audience:** The millions of Protestant pastors, ordination candidates, church leaders, and Christian university leaders in the United States.

Manuscript: Roughly one-quarter of the eventual 90,000-word book is complete. The author intends to finish the manuscript by the end of August 2018.

Author Bio: Jennie A. Harrop is an English professor at George Fox University with a PhD in English from the University of Denver, an MFA in creative writing from Colorado State University, and a BA in journalism from Pacific Lutheran University. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies through Portland Seminary at George Fox University. She has taught a variety of university-level literature, composition, and creative writing courses – face-to-face, hybrid, and online – at George Fox University, Liberty University, Chemeketa Community College, Colorado State University, and the University of Denver. In the 1980s and 1990s, she was a news and crime reporter for several newspapers, including the *Chicago News Tribune*, *The Oregonian*, and *The Tacoma News Tribune*. She is currently Chair of the Department of Professional Studies and Director of the Portland Writing Center at George Fox University.

She has published a variety of essays, book reviews, articles, and short stories in recent years, including a 2018 open textbook titled *The Simple Math of Writing Well: Writing for the 21st Century*. While living in Colorado, she wrote monthly books reviews for the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* newspaper for more than a decade, and she currently writes book reviews for the *Portland Book Review*. She published three children's books through Oxford University Press in 2012, she has a fourth forthcoming from Cambridge University Press in 2018, and her critical book titled *Angling for Repose: Wallace Stegner and the De-Mythologizing of the American West* was published in 2010.

Harrop and her family are active in their home church, where Harrop preaches on occasion. She is a candidate for ordination in ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, an elder in the Presbyterian church for more than 12 years, a fifth-generation Oregonian, and blessed with a lively and joyful home with her husband and five children.

Publishing Credits:

The Simple Math of Writing Well: Writing for the 21st Century. Newberg, OR: Pennington ePress, 2018.

Little Sparks Storybook 1. Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2013.

Little Sparks Storybook 2. Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2013.

Little Sparks Storybook 3. Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2013.

Angling for Repose: Wallace Stegner and the De-Mythologizing of the American West. Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010.

“Angling for Repose: De-Mythologizing the American West in Wallace Stegner’s *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*.” *North Dakota Quarterly*, 74:2 (2007) 19-39.

“Parallel Tracks” (short story). *Prairie Schooner* 71:4 (1997). 132-144.

“After the Rain” (short story). *Nieve Roja Review* 1 (1997): 4 Jan. 2005

Future Projects:

- *A Woman’s Place* – This book will employ a twenty-first-century lens to look at how women have been treated in the Christian church over the centuries, how Jesus intended that they be treated, and the direction that future Christian leaders will need to walk in order to inspire the dramatic cultural shift demanded before women can begin to be considered equal to men.
- *Secular Jesus* – This book will examine a western American nonbeliever’s idea of who Jesus was, how that secular mythology has emerged, and what biblical truth can be brought to the conversation.
- *The Christian Prison House* – This book will look at historical linguistic trends that have reduced larger theological concepts to pithy colloquialisms and political hotbeds. If Christianity is to have a voice in our twenty-first-century culture, what linguistic sensitivities do pastoral and church leaders need to adopt in order to communicate well with a nonbelieving world?

SECTION 6:

POSTSCRIPT

In a chapter titled “Religion is a Headache,” Andrew Farley denounces the regulations that inform our definition of “Christianity” still to this day:

Why did Jesus seem to go out of his way to antagonize the Pharisees and other religious leaders? Why did he anger them throughout his ministry? He healed on the Sabbath, and they hated him for it. He turned over their money tables, and they despised him for it. He called them snakes, when doing so certainly didn’t help the relationship. But he did these things to show the difference between real life and the counterfeit technique of self-focused behavior modification. ... Through his resurrection, Jesus would eventually offer his Jewish contemporaries genuine life. The religious zealots of his day were working against him as they pretended to already possess life. The source of life himself saw right through their charades.¹⁵¹

When I talk to nonbelievers, the Jesus they have heard about is – more often than not – a bizarre composite of social construction, pharisaical hypocrisy, and authoritative judgmentalism; the Jesus of the Gospels and referenced here by Farley is utterly foreign to them. The goal, then, is to allow the true, life-giving Jesus to trump our pharisaical effigy, but how do we successfully write a new definition when we have to grounds with a nonbelieving audience for trust or authority? How do we create a safe place for those around us to listen and engage when their assumption is that we are just as hypocritical and self-righteous as a “religious” Jesus? The answer lies not in how we present ourselves or our message, but in how we perceive, receive, and affirm our audience – not just in a singular act, but over and over and over again as we seek to attain biblical empathy akin to what Jesus demonstrates throughout the Gospels. The answer lies in the Jesus Quotient.

¹⁵¹ Farley, 74.

Much like the Pharisees, we long for simple math: Tell me the equation, and I will dutifully find the sum, checking off the elements of my faith with risk-free precision, minimal sacrifice, and nearly nonexistent engagement. Eliminate the math, and we are left with the messiness of humanity. In our effort to identify the formula, we turn inward first – seeking assurance that our own IQ and EQ mark us as ready and worthy. But such a focus on self is certainly not the end result. The optimal equation employs a focus on audience that is at once empathetic and wise, measured and infinite. Without IQ and EQ, we cannot discern our own life purpose. And without AQ, we cannot put that purpose into action. *The Jesus Quotient* speaks to a combination of the three, leading one into another until we arrive at a place where our sensitivity to audience drives how we engage with the world in every way. The Jesus Quotient is the ultimate measure of who we are and what we are capable of being, and yet the quotient itself is measurable only by God; the very simple math that we seek is thwarted by a God whose wisdom, love, mercy, peace, joy, grace, and forgiveness are immeasurable. Jesus calls us in Matthew 28:19-20 to share His light to the ends of the earth; how do we do that in a way that honors those who are listening? What if we poured as much into articulating and assessing our own AQ as we have first our IQ and then our EQ? What will it take for believers to realize the importance of AQ in sharing the truth of our faith with others?

The paradox runs deeper than we realize. As Leonard Sweet reminds us in *Nudge*, the new millennium longs for engagement but keeps us at a distance from one another:

The twenty-first century is increasingly being asked to live without touch. Evidences of a touchless culture are everywhere. We live in a totally sex-obsessed culture, but a culture that refuses to explore the depth of the meaning and significance of sex. Contacts with coworkers are bathed in “don’t touch” workshops. In hospitals, we can drug people; we can hook electrodes up to their brains and give them shocks against their will; we can put people in straitjackets;

but we aren't allowed to hug them. Death-row inmates are not allowed "contact visits" where they can touch or hug family members except the last visit before their execution.¹⁵²

In a similar fashion, our twenty-first-century culture longs for purpose but eschews "religion." Self-actualization books and seminars abound, and the answers typically are self-focused in a way that spirals into a sense of emptiness, particularly when crises arise: *You are a Badass: How to Stop Doubting Your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life* (2013), *The Happiness Project* (2009), *What Should I Do with My Life?* (2002), *You Can Buy Happiness (and It's Cheap)* (2012), *The Secrets of Happy Families* (2013), *Finding Your Own North Star* (1997), *The Success Principles* (2004). This dissertation is an attempt to bridge the gulf between those who are seeking and the profound peace that Jesus offers. In a culture where the word "Jesus" is tantamount to a shame-filled curse, I long for the day when we can agree to disagree, but – above all else – love and listen well.

Perhaps the most gratifying part of this process has been sharing the concept of an Audience Quotient with friends, coworkers, and students. The responses have surprised me as people readily acknowledge our need to identify and shed personal baggage before expecting to listen well to others. Everyone I have shared with has, in return, shared with me a story of an ineffective speaker, a painful personal exchange, or a church-endorsed dictate that fell horribly flat. I began pondering the idea of IQ → EQ → AQ in September 2015, and I have been researching and filtering related ideas ever since. Writing the dissertation has been a culmination of more than two years of focused work and more than twenty years of observations in higher education and in the church. The Written Statement fell together naturally as I sat surrounded by the countless volumes I have

¹⁵² Sweet, *Nudge*, 240.

purchased in recent years, striving to soak myself as fully as possible in current dialogue. The opening chapters of the *Artifact* emerged as a response to the pain I encounter nearly every day in the classroom, in the grocery store, at the gas station. When hurt is inflicted in the name of Jesus, its effects are dangerously more egregious than the church realizes. If our words unwittingly inflict pain that keeps another from seeking God, are we able to face the consequences of our actions? Consider Jesus' reprimand in Matthew 23: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are."¹⁵³ If we do not stop to take stock of our own pain, we have no business evangelizing a peace that we cannot embody.

In researching and writing this dissertation, I have had my suspicions confirmed more fully than I anticipated when I began this project more than two years ago: The church is consistently unable to acknowledge the role it has played in inflicting hurt among those who are seeking, wondering, and wanting to participate. In Matthew 23, Jesus lambasts church leaders for their role in judging and alienating those around them. How are we different today? When I raise this topic with nonbelievers and occasional church-goers, they agree without pause. When I broach the idea with pastors and long-time church attendees, many become mildly defensive, questioning the preexisting baggage of those who may claim that the church has caused harm: "They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."¹⁵⁴ I look forward to seeking a publisher for the

¹⁵³ Matt. 23:15.

¹⁵⁴ Matt. 23:4.

Artifact and watching for conferences and other speaking opportunities; I firmly believe that the IQ → EQ → AQ concept needs to be heard.

The areas I see for further study include the future projects I list in Section 5:

1. **Women in the church:** When I attended church in Colorado for more than eight years, serving as a ruling elder, leading the college-age small group, and teaching a weekly Bible study to more than eighty women, I was told repeatedly of the beauty of God's plan for the genders: an even hierarchy from God to man to woman. What a pleasure it is to serve men with a grateful heart, the men and women alike told me, and I wondered how I could enter the fullness of who God wants me to be if I had to defer to another gender that would always stand above me. When my family came to retrieve my children and my from an increasingly abusive marriage, bringing us home to Oregon, that same church sent shaming letters and emails, offering me a single one-way airline ticket, paid for by the session I once served on, asking that I come home to my rightful place beside my first husband – despite the abuse. When I was first asked to serve as an elder at our current home church in Oregon, my application was waylaid by several nominating committee members who decided the church was not ready for a single, divorced woman in leadership. Because of these experiences and those of the women I encounter every day, I would like to pursue a nonfiction popular book titled *A Woman's Place* that explores the history and mythologies of a woman's role according to the church, including a discussion of the biblical truth Jesus offers us.
2. **The secular idea of Jesus:** When I asked my unbelieving brother in a recent telephone conversation to describe to me what he knows of Jesus Christ, I listened in

silence to a long description of an earthly, angry, judgmental man who appears nowhere in the New Testament. When I told my brother that what he had described to me was a cultural construct, mostly created by white male pastors over the centuries, he was surprised. Why has the church failed so wholly in promoting the complex truth of who Jesus was and why He walked on the earth? Each time I teach a new faith-based university course, I ask students to describe to me what they know of Jesus; invariably they describe the commandments, the shame, the guilt, the senseless rules, and the judgment of the Pharisees and Sadducees – the very people Jesus came to set straight. Even as a child in the Presbyterian church, I was raised believing that Jesus was a rock-steady example of smiling calm. When I heard the story of Jesus flipping the tables of the moneychangers in the temple, berating them for soiling His Father’s house,¹⁵⁵ I was astounded. Both the culture and the church work hard to define Jesus in ways that He simply cannot be defined. His complexity of love and anger, sorrow and joy, belie the checklist we all long to study. Another book I would like to consider researching is *Secular Jesus*, an exploration of the misleading mythologies that have nonbelievers and some believers cringing even at the sound of his name.

3. **Linguistic limitations:** Another sticking point for nonbelievers and believers alike can be the language that we use to describe and explore our faith. For long-time church-goers, the vocabulary is simple, but for those outside of the Christian culture, many of these words are as baffling as the assumption that all are familiar with them: *devotions, fellowship, body and blood, the flesh, quiet time, born again, washed in the blood, unblemished lamb, fruit of the spirit, saved by grace, savior, saved, believer,*

¹⁵⁵ Matt. 21:12.

sin, Jesus, God, Holy Ghost, testimony, praise, prayer requests, calling, hedge of protection, hand raising, worship, prayer walks, etc. If I attend a higher-level physics course taught by a professor who is using language beyond my understanding, I likely will stop listening and assume that the lecture is not intended for me. Why would nonbelievers attending a Christianese-laden church service not do the same? Even worse, if those jargoned words are used to criticize, ridicule, or shame me, I will distance myself from the source and any echo of the source as much as I am able to. What would it take for us to examine the language we use, consider the audience we are hoping to reach, and rewrite the linguistic limitations that prevent us from reaching that audience in an effective or loving way? At what point do we as a church acknowledge that our language is dangerously off-putting to others? The third project I would like to explore is a book titled *The Christian Prison House*, an echo of Fredric Jameson's themes in *The Prison-House of Language* that will look at historical trends, linguistic limitations, and the possibility of a future church led by a sensitivity to audience and external reception.

APPENDIX A:

ARTIFACT

THE JESUS QUOTIENT:

IQ → EQ → AQ



Photo by [Wenni Zhou](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Jennie A. Harrop, Ph.D.

The Jesus Quotient: IQ → EQ → AQ

Preface

Chapter 1: A 21st-Century Problem

Chapter 2: The 20th-Century Answer

Chapter 3: A 21st-Century Sensibility

Chapter 4: The Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

Chapter 5: The Emotional Quotient (EQ)

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Chapter 7: The Future Church

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Conclusion



Photo by [Marko Horvat](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Preface

It was January, and the classroom was cold when I called my pastor, hoping that the letter he had drafted was an error. I walked between the desks as I waited for him to pick up, sweeping bits of paper with my fingers and straightening the chairs. When he answered, I was relieved to hear his comforting Southern drawl.

“Scott,” I said in a rush. “How are you? How’s Mara?” I wanted to step inside the phone, out of this chilly classroom and the uneasiness of this new life and back into the warm familiarity of their kitchen.

“We’re fine,” Scott answered, his voice iron-cool. “You needed help with something?”

“Yes, yes,” I said, sitting on the desk at the front of the room, facing my students’ chairs as if they were still there. He sounded odd, but it was the middle of a workday and I knew he likely had back-to-back meetings. Scott, Mara, and I had been close friends for more than eight years, and I missed knowing that they were a coffee-invitation away. My

move a month prior to exit an abusive marriage and return to family three states west had been difficult on all fronts, and I was thankful for their friendship. “The reference letter surprised me. Did you intend the changes you made? The paragraph about my time as an elder was deleted.”

“I sent the correct letter,” Scott said coolly, and for a moment the line was quiet. I had returned to work that month as a college professor after ten years at home with babies and preschoolers, and I was shuffling as many courses as I could manage as a newly single mother of five. Scott’s first reference letter for me, the one he wrote before I told him I was moving, was supportive, affirming, even boastful. Because of it, I was now teaching five English and composition courses at a college in my former home state, and hoping to take on more at a university across the country that was seeking an online Ph.D.-level professor – hence, the second reference letter.

“You know I can’t use this letter,” I protested, still believing there had been a mistake. “You question my ethics, and you left out everything you said in your first letter about leadership skills, loyalty, longevity at the church.”

“I’m sorry it’s not what you wanted,” Scott replied, his words careful.

“What’s going on?” I asked. “Are you upset?”

“I’m not pleased with the choices you’ve made,” Scott said.

“You knew the situation was dangerous. You offered the church as a safe haven if things got worse. And you knew my family was coming to get us.”

“Those were your perceptions,” Scott said.

“Perceptions? Two months ago, you agreed and urged me to get help. Scott, are you in there?” I asked with surprise. “Where is my friend, my pastor?”

“I am *not* your pastor,” Scott said angrily. “You left us. You chose to move. And when you did, I stopped being your pastor.”

“Is that how it works?” I was incredulous. “Because I moved, I’m cut off?”

“You moved, and you will find a new pastor,” Scott replied.

I waited, shocked, hoping desperately that one of us would have something else to say. I had not wanted to leave the church that had been my home for nearly a decade, the place where I had baptized my children, taught countless Bible studies, and served on the elder board. I had not wanted to leave a life that I had once seen as God-ordained and idyllic. I had not wanted to leave a comfortable friendship with my pastor and his wife. And I had not expected this. “Then I guess this is it – ?” I said.

“I guess so,” Scott answered.

I said goodbye, and I felt a wall begin to rise.



Angela pushed the deep red, velvety curtain back with her fingers and stepped nervously inside, wondering whether she should perch on the front of the tiny bench or force herself to lean back. She thought she could see a shadow behind the iron grid on the left side of the confessional, but she wasn’t sure. “Hello?” she said quietly, her voice lilting through the air like a spring petal caught on an upturned breeze.

“Bienvenido, senorita,” the priest said. “Que puedo hacer por ti, mi hija?”

Angela took a breath, allowing her brain a moment to shift from English to Spanish, and filtered through the images in her brain, wondering what was appropriate to

share and what was permissible to leave out. She pulled the curtain closed and knelt on the dusty floor. “Perdoname, padre,” she said. “Han pasado dos semanas desde mi última confesión ...”

She had arrived in Madrid four months prior, and life was good. Her courses at the university were easy, she loved the dance clubs that opened at 11 p.m. and pulsed with energy until 5 or 6 each morning, she adored the Spanish men who complimented her blue eyes and American accent, and she appreciated this little church where she could always find a priest to assuage her sins.

The priest listened silently, his face turned to the side so all Angela could see was a faint silhouette, and Angela told him about her nights in the clubs along the Plaza Mayor, her skipped assignments in art history at the University of Madrid, and her envy of the friends back home who had reminded her that her time abroad would negate her chances to ever sit on a high school homecoming court. Angela left out the more intimate details of her dates with Patrick, and she declined to speak of her growing doubt about God, the church, and her own salvation. If God were real, wouldn’t he know already?

Angela spoke for 10, 15, 20 minutes, and then waited silently. She stared at the wall of the confessional and watched for the dim shadows to shift, wondering if the priest was young or old. She longed for the priest to step through the confessional curtain, imploring her to stand for a proper hug as he assured her that she is loved, she is valued, and she can do better. Instead she listened to the shuffle of shoes in the sanctuary beyond and inhaled the sweet, musky incense smells that made her feel like she was eight again. When the priest suggested three Hail Marys, four Our Fathers, and a deeper commitment to her studies, Angela agreed with a mixture of relief and consternation.

Later that night, as Angela repeated her assigned prayers on her knees in her fifth-floor flat, the heaviness of repetition was suffocating. Angela inhaled softly and exhaled quickly, longing for something more. And she felt a wall begin to rise.



Tom shifted in his seat, straining to see the teenagers three rows to his left. He was surprised to see so many gathered in one place on a Sunday morning, and he wondered why they were there. Had their parents made them come? Was it an excuse to be together? Did they really believe this stuff?

“The Word of the Lord,” the pastor said as he finished reading and closed his book. A low murmur echoed through the room as people recited something back to him; Tom couldn’t make out the words, but it solidified the oddity of the club. He leaned into Lisa, wanting to read her mind as she took this all in. Were these just pleasant reminders of a childhood past? Was there something more she needed here? She leaned back into him but did not respond otherwise, her eyes locked on the man up front.

The pastor was a decent speaker. He clearly was enjoying himself as he paced back and forth, occasionally raising a hand in emphasis or pausing dramatically, sweeping his eyes across the room as if expecting an answer. He wore a beige button-down Oxford tucked into dark jeans, which was curious to Tom. Was he appealing to the teenaged crowd, a Silicon Valley culture, a new era of come-as-you-are? Tom’s dad would have been appalled, had he been alive. He was never a church person, but Tom’s dad would have expected any speaker to have the dignity to dress nicely – certainly more

than jeans and a shirt. For Tom's dad, the casual dress would have solidified his disdain for religious types.

Tom pressed his index finger into his knee: one, two, three, four. He was counting the number of times the pastor repeated his question, "What did Jesus come to save us from?" The repetitions were rhythmic and attention-getting, Tom could see that as he surveyed those around him, but the pastor did not seem to have any idea how rife with undefined terms his repetitions were – let alone the annoyance of a dangling preposition, another glitch that would have irritated his father. Did Jesus come at all? Did he have intent? Was he capable of saving? Why did people need to be saved? Was all of this past or present tense? Was the pastor suggesting that Tom needed to be saved from something? And yes, what did Jesus intend to save people *from*?

"What do you think?" the pastor implored loudly, gesturing at the audience with his right hand. "What does Jesus save us from?"

"Satan," one woman answered.

"The culture," said a man to Tom's right.

"Ourselves," another woman said.

"All true," the pastor nodded, clearly not hearing the word he hoped to hear. "Do you want to hear a secret?" he asked, looking straight at Tom and Lisa. Tom stared back, willing the guy to look away. In a moment, he did, walking left to the other end of the stage. "The answer is not what you think," he said to the people in the front rows. He walked back to the middle and stood with his arms outstretched, an expectant look on his face as he waited for all eyes to land on him. "Jesus came to save us from God," he said, his voice loud and sure.

Ouch, Tom thought. There it is. Tom felt Lisa pull back a little, and he sensed a general stirring around him. Were they agreeing, disagreeing, or just shifting? *From God? Really?*

“Jesus came to save us from the righteous wrath of God,” the man continued, walking and waving his hands again. “Because our hearts are dark and our will is weak, the truth of who we are is actually shameful to God. Jesus came to take that shame and anger on himself so that God can look at us with new eyes.”

And so admission to the cult begins, Tom thought. What depraved, ridiculous, and ill-defined assumptions, Tom concluded. Did anyone here realize that speeches like this are grounded in logical fallacies? Did anyone here really believe this bunk? Tom looked at his watch, willing the minutes to tick by more quickly so they could move on to lunch. And so a wall began to rise.



The last time Gretchen tried to attend church with a friend, she passed out cold. She had arrived early that Sunday and parked on the far end of the parking lot, texting her friend from her car to see if she had arrived yet. As Gretchen waited in the safety of her car, the heat humming and the stereo thumping a low backbeat, she watched the people as they parked and filed into the church. She was watching for something, she knew, but she wasn't exactly sure what: Friends from high school? Her grandmother? Conservative types she could easily dismiss? Liberal types ready to tell her what to eat, wear, and

think? The youth pastor who had told her for years that her assertiveness would one day be her demise?

“In the mezzanine with COFFEE!” her friend texted. “Come join!”

Gretchen took a breath and tucked her phone into her pocket. A blue Ford Escort backed into the space to her left, and she watched for the elderly couple to emerge.

Gretchen assumed the woman was waiting for the man to walk around the car and open his wife’s door, but instead the woman walked over to take her husband’s arm, supporting his unsteady steps as they strolled together toward the open front doors.

Another family three cars to the right unloaded from a gray Honda Odyssey, with three or four kids dashing ahead of their parents.

“You will never be a Proverbs 31 woman,” the youth pastor had told her some twenty years prior, and Gretchen sometimes wondered if the echo of his voice was God’s voice, a steady reminder in her brain of the deficiencies she needed to correct if she wanted to go to church. But these days she hardly wanted to ponder Christianity, let alone claim it. What right did people have to tell others how to live their lives? What motivated them to want to meddle in everyone else’s business, telling them that it was their way or no way at all? And what was a Proverbs 31 woman besides an outdated misogynistic construct anyway?

Gretchen stepped out of her car and inhaled deeply, steadying herself to walk through the open doors and find her friend. Coffee will help, she reminded herself. Just walk to the coffee. As she entered the mezzanine, the lights dazzled her eyes and the voices gathered into a wave of sound, beckoning enticingly at the same time as it threatened to crash down upon her. Gretchen’s friend waved from the edge of what

looked like a coffee bar, and Gretchen walked toward her, measuring her steps and breathing carefully. “You will never be,” she heard him say again, a tiresome monotone chant: “You will never be.”

One moment she was walking, and the next moment she was squinting up into the lights, her shoulders blades pressed into the hard, clean floor, and her friend gently shaking her shoulders. “Gretchen?” her friend pleaded. “What happened? Are you all right?”

What an astute question, Gretchen thought: “Am I all right?” Mostly yes, she had concluded, but not in this place. And so a wall began to rise.



When Anthony’s college department downsized and the position he had drawn up eighteen years prior was eliminated from the budget, he felt like his world had tilted in a dangerously unfamiliar way. The projects that been his greatest accomplishments were nearly meaningless, and the skills that had garnered praise and propelled him forward now carried little weight. Where was the meaning? Where would he find purpose? What did he have to hope in?

Anthony had grown up in and then raised his own children in a church with beautiful accoutrements and traditions: a pipe organ that filled the entire choir loft, Easter and Christmas Eve services that boasted multiple choirs and musical ensembles, frequent dramatic monologues and skits, children’s and youth classes that attracted dozens, and impeccably landscaped grounds. The sermons were standard and the people were kind,

and Anthony attended every Sunday that he was in town and available. He knew the church offered other activities that met mid-week – community groups, seasonal activities, and social gatherings – but he preferred to confine his church attendance to Sunday mornings, just as his parents had.

When Anthony lost his job and sought help from an associate pastor, the man's words were kind, but something rang hollow: "Wait on God," he told Anthony. "Your good works will bear fruit." "Remember to practice listening prayer." "God's timing is the best timing." "God has a plan." "Lean on Him." Anthony nodded and agreed, wanting to encourage the man that he was pastoring well, but the words meant little to him. How would waiting, listening, or leaning pay his mortgage? What if God chose not to answer? What if God wasn't there at all?

Anthony was surprised to find the church services increasingly devoid as well. How long had he been accepting as truth words that ultimately held very little meaning for him? Most everyone smiled, encouraging him to be encouraged, and offered hugs, but where was a job? Where was his next step? Where was God?

When the congregation stood to sing the Doxology, Anthony felt an irritation rising that surprised and scared him. "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." All blessings? And by whose timing? "Praise Him, all creatures here below." All creatures? Really? "Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts." Heavenly hosts? What were they, and what did they have to do with him? "Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." These three never made sense. A father? A ghost?

Anthony surveyed the room around him, considering the smiling faces and the family-like camaraderie, and he realized something: As kind as people can be, most do

not want to enter in too fully. Even when Anthony met with the associate pastor, his comments were careful and measured, almost scripted, and he did not ask Anthony too many questions.

“Wait on God,” Anthony remembered as he made his way to the door, and he shook his head disdainfully, relieved to be walking out of that place. And so a wall began to rise.



I teach a required course at my university called “Christian Faith & Thought.” Although we are a Christian university with roots in the Quaker tradition, the majority of our adult students self-describe as nonbelievers, which make this course both a challenge and a delight to teach. While I typically share a syllabus with students two weeks before the course begins, I am never quite sure what I will encounter when I walk into the classroom or which direction the course will take. My first term, I taught the course to a room of grounded believers and one woman who was seeking. We spent the bulk of our time weighing the strategic brilliance of C. S. Lewis’ apologetics in his 1940s-radio-program-turned-book *Mere Christianity*. Most of the students had read the bulk of Lewis’ oeuvre already, so our discussions centered on comparisons of Lewis’ 20th-century strategies with 21st-century challenges. The one woman who was seeking but not yet a believer seemed engaged throughout the term, and in her final church visit assignment, she reported a pleasant experience with a local Lutheran congregation. It was a calm, pleasant semester, and I now realize that my first class was an anomaly.

Since that year, my course has consistently been comprised of atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and – above all – men and women who have been deeply wounded by the church. This latter population is what concerns me the most and what has inspired *The Jesus Quotient*. When people have not yet heard Jesus' message of joy and peace, we can approach them with a certain boldness that the gift we bring is life-giving, life-saving, and eternal. But when people have been wounded by that very gift in the past, the inroad is far more difficult. If we are not sensitive to the language we use, the assumptions we make, the emotions that may arise on any side, and the baggage we ourselves shoulder, we will not communicate well. Matthew 28 calls us to share the Gospel far and wide, boldly and well, but how can we do that when the words we use communicate pain, and the gestures we make are demeaning? How can we expect to communicate well when we are not sensitive to the reverberations of our own souls? Why is it that we teach pastors and other Christian leaders to exegete Scripture, and yet we don't press them to articulate their own fears? How can we send missionaries into our neighborhoods and neighboring countries without teaching them about the limitations and expansive horizons of their own intelligence and emotions? How can we ask our appointed leaders to speak to both individuals and massive crowds with a Jesus sensibility but no training about how to read a room? Once the wall begins to rise, it can be difficult to lower; a chief goal, therefore, should be to produce leaders who have an astute awareness of the wall – what causes it, what lowers it, what prevents it.

In a Christian Faith & Thought course I taught recently, one young woman shook visibly at the mention of Jesus, another averted her eyes any time we spoke of God in the paternal sense, and still another failed the course because she could not bring herself to

attend a church of her own choosing for a final assignment. None of these women were lazy or flippant. All were hard-working professionals, mothers, wives, and students. And all carried wounds from decades prior when a pastor or other church authority shamed, criticized, berated, or scolded them. If we are concerned about our unchurched culture, perhaps it is time we look beyond the culture, the church, and the systems that inform our religion; perhaps it is time we look at ourselves, acknowledging the logs and helping one another to replace the splinters with the glint of Jesus.

While we have discussed home churches and missional community involvement in recent decades, we have done little to acknowledge that the vernacular Tim Keller calls us to is nearly impossible to achieve in a culture that is deeply entrenched with biblical mythologies. How do we speak without raising walls of assumption, judgment, defensiveness, or anger? How do we assess the criticisms or hurt of others if we cannot identify our own? Jesus did not ponder IQ or EQ. He knew his God-given purpose and emotional character so deeply that he was able to operate out of those foundations without pausing to ponder His next best step. Jesus' example presses us to step into a third quotient that is best referred to as "Audience Quotient." AQ is our ability to focus fully on another: to love as we have been loved, to see as we are seen, and to teach and disciple as Jesus taught us to do. It is time we train university and church leaders to transcend from IQ to EQ to AQ, aspiring to a Jesus Quotient that aligns with the Great Commission in ways that will help us to re-sign the church as a safe place for renewal, energy, peace, and joy, rather than the hypocrisy and judgmentalism that has maligned its name for generations.



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Chapter 1: A 21st-Century Problem

It is difficult to right a wrong when we have no awareness of the wrong that occurred in the first place. A pastor confessed recently his great surprise when a friend expressed wariness about the church. Church people are hypocritical, this man told the pastor, and the risk of rejection and betrayal is just too great. The pastor expressed surprise and sorrow at his words, since this was not his experience with the church and he was unsure why this friend would have such an impression. As a professor and bivocational church leader, I can see where a pastor dutifully trained in seminary and mentored in how best to shepherd his flock might inadvertently sidestep the cultural wave that says *no* to church hypocrisy and *yes* to relativism and self-help. But our lens has to be wider, our worldview a little broader.

Another pastor friend has mourned aloud that his time and circles are so narrow that he does not have nonbelieving friends and therefore feels out of touch with the anger and assumptions of his neighbors who are outside of the church. Jesus came in part to clarify that the *us versus them* dichotomy we so easily slide into is not only erroneous but

dangerous; two millennia later, the challenge has intensified. Rather than embracing individuals more wholly, listening to their stories and questions with a deep sense of love, grace, and respect for humanity, we use terms like post-church and post-Christianity to further alienate ourselves from a culture that we are – like it or not –intrinsically a part of. Yes, we may rely on 1 John 2 as a reminder to not hold too tightly to worldly things, but verses like these are not a pass to extricate ourselves from life and elevate ourselves above those who most need love and affirmation. God created a world with connections so intricate that even our highest levels of mathematics cannot yet define potential leaps across time and space, matter and spirit. The Christian church is a part of His vast plan, and every decision we make casts ripples reverberating outward in ways that we prefer to deny or excuse or ignore. When will we acknowledge step boldly into a new future with Holy Spirit-confidence, optimism, and joy, rather than back-pedaling, anxiety, and fear?

Doomsayers rarely bring anything productive to a conversation, and yet Christians have consistently stood at the forefront, decrying the culture and pining for the better years of yesterday; that kind of whining sounds ridiculous to an educated nonbeliever, curious to a seeker, and indescribably painful to those who feel accused or alienated. If I bemoan change or proclaim an anxiety about the future, is the crux of my fear biblical? Am I longing for peace and comfort for all Christians, as if that is something promised in Paul's letters? Am I clinging to verses like 1 John 2:15-17 in exclusion of Jesus command to "Love your neighbor as yourself"? Jesus calls us to enter fully in a way that is mindful and intentional, loving and grace-filled, and yet we so often define ourselves versus the other with language that divides and isolates. When I ask a roomful of adult students about the cultural shifts they have witnessed in their lifetimes,

the non-Christian students are more likely to speak with acuity and foresight of conversations that are uncomfortable but necessary, or new means of communication that are surprising but helpful. The Christian students are typically the ones who speak of fear, decline, degradation, collapse, and even panic. We are called as Christians to walk in the culture with Holy Spirit confidence, not direct or critique it from afar. If we want to proclaim the peace and joy of the Gospel to an audience that is able to hear us, we must learn to acknowledge and measure the words that we use and the intent with which we speak them.

The 21st century has exploded forward with a complexity of human communication that we never anticipated nor metered. Our ability to communicate with one another instantly and from nearly any corner of the world is staggering, and the ultimate outflow of this capability should be relief that we are finally engaging in conversations we were once too fearful to broach. But because we are in the midst of the cultural anomaly – because the voices are in multitude, cacophonous, and, for the first time, unregulated – we are afraid. And fear can be a dangerous emotion in both humans and animals. Any domesticated animal that is afraid, whether a dog, cat, or hamster, is far more likely to respond aggressively as a means of self-protection; humans do the same. When we play the aggressor from a lynchpin of fear, we hold onto a power that falsely assures us of our own safety and further marginalizes those who are not part of our inner circle. When we pair fear with power and aggression with reactionary behaviors, we do not have a recipe for love, grace, or an ability to hear deeply and well. Nonbelievers know this. Why don't we?

Four key concepts that have arisen in my classrooms and always demand space for debate are (1) the Google Age, (2) Social Media, (3) Worldviews, and (4) Postmodernism. When the secular world enters boldly into conversations like these, we need to listen and consider as well, rather than retreating and holding tightly to what is familiar. How will we enter in without accusing, defending, or otherwise inciting the walls to rise?

The Google Age

The air was cold as I stood in line outside the public high school, one of more than thirty teenagers waiting for the custodian to unlock the doors. It was our fourth week of class, and I knew the routine. If I arrived in time to be among the first ten kids in line, I would be fine; much past ten, and it could be a scramble. I heard the *thwack* of the first bolt sliding back, and we all stood a little straighter, blowing clouds of white into the cold morning air and waiting for the doors to swing open. As the left door began to open, I felt a kid behind me brush past, cutting ahead before I had a chance to stop him. “Hey!” I protested, and then we all pushed in, speed-walking down the waxed vinyl floors toward the typing room in the south hall. When I made it to the room, I beelined for the small electric typewriter under the far window. With a sigh of relief, I slid into the seat and pulled off my coat, looking with pity at the students who were still wandering in, rolling their eyes at the manual typewriters that remained. The goal was to claim a Smith Corona or a Brother Electric before the seats filled; otherwise, you were left to the slow press and carriage return of a manual typewriter, which always reduced your words-per-minute by at least a third.

We had both a manual and a Smith Corona in my childhood home, and I loved the clack and pull of the manual. Even in the 1970s, the manual typewriter carried a kind of nostalgia that echoed of tragic hours of writerly angst – something that appealed to me. What fun it was to yank partially filled pages from its carriage, relishing the whirl of gears as I crumpled the page and tossed it behind me, pressing a new page into place. As my school papers lengthened, I recognized the ease of the smooth-flowing Smith Corona; instead of tossing an entire page each time my thoughts shifted or I hit an inadvertent key, I could dab Liquid Paper artfully enough to erase the error and present a clean page.

In my undergraduate years, friends tried to wean me from my Smith Corona, persuading me of the brilliance of an IBM personal computer that eliminated the need for correction fluid and allowed for a more stream-of-consciousness approach to writing. I resisted until my Intercultural Communications professor lost a 25-page term paper that I had turned in early in order to free my week for other projects. The professor apologized and was kind enough to assess me the grade he believed I would have earned, but I was crushed to have all of my hard work slide into oblivion so easily, without affirmation or feedback. For my next paper, I silenced my roommates by agreeing to compose my first paper on a borrowed IBM. Fourteen pages into my work, with footnotes painstakingly placed and library books stacked precariously across my desk, I heard an electrical click and watched my green glowing words and the blinking curser fade to black. “It must have crashed,” my roommate said later. “It happens.” The paper was lost, as was my faith in computers. It would be three more years before a newspaper editor insisted that I compose my stories directly onto the newsroom PCs rather than a yellow pad. In the

1980s and into the 1990s, a computer crash typically meant that the information lost was irretrievable – inextricably lost in an electrical glitch that wiped everything clean.

In 2003, thieves rummaged through every corner of our two-story home, smashing valuables, sweeping books to the floor, and stealing electronics. Gone was my 1990s laptop computer, which had been sitting on a living room desk with the first 80 pages of my Ph.D. dissertation stored on its hard drive. When the police apprehended the thieves nearly a year later when they tried to similarly rampage a neighbor's home, our electronics were long gone – sold out the trunks of sedans or in pawn shops, and likely wiped clear of any reminders that they once belonged to someone else. It was painful to have to rewrite those early chapters of my first dissertation, but the work was lost and it had to be duplicated in order for me to move forward with my degree.

When I first accessed the internet in the 1990s, the rabbit trails of information were exciting but dangerous. Not only would x-rated material sometimes appear at inopportune times, but it could be difficult to recover information or patterns once a new trail began. Just as I feared the electrical click and black screen of a PC crash, I also was often anxious about clicking too far into something that I would not be able to find my way back out of. I still hold remnants of that anxiety now, and my kids laugh at me for it. For me, the internet is an astounding tool brought forward in the late 1980s to bring millions of versions of my childhood *World Book Encyclopedias* to the forefront – volatile, fallible, and awe-inspiring. For my kids – none of whom were born “in the 19s,” as they call the previous millennium – the internet is their worldview, their lens for discerning what is real and possible and true. When we ask a younger generation to stack their cell phones in a basket or unplug for a few days, we are ostensibly asking them to

remove a portion of their brain that processes the world. Yes, limits are necessary, particularly when immature brains are involved, but as we learn to engage fully with a culture in need, how can we learn to say *yes* rather than *no*, or *let's imagine* rather than *never*?

In the 1990s, I watched Lieutenant Commander Data on the series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* with awe. When Captain Picard or other crew members asked Data a question, the human-like android would pause to compute and the results were astounding. A fellow crew member could ask Data any factual question, and he was able to answer with complete accuracy; here was my *World Book* come to life. The only hitch was time, which typically added to the drama of each episode. If Chief Engineer LaForge needed critical information in order to know how to proceed without imploding the Starship Enterprise, Data would hear the question and first compute how much time it would take him to arrive at an answer. Sometimes the solution was immediate, but – more often than not – combing through the infinite amounts of data in Data's inner wiring took hours and sometimes days. Typically Data would complete his computations and arrive at the correct answer mere seconds before the ship was expected to crash or explode, narrowly averting whatever disaster was impending. While his artificial intelligence and synthetic construction affirmed his accuracy and immunity to biological weaknesses, Data was unable to conceptualize emotion or imagination, two deficiencies that added to the longing and complexity of his character.

Data, meet Siri, Alexa, Cortana, Bixby, and Google Assistant. What the writers of *Star Trek* imagined in the 1990s has fully entered our lives in the 21st century, and for many of us, it is the most astounding and frightening advancement of the Google Age.

When we allow artificial intelligence (AI) assistants into our homes, cars, and workplaces, what ethical borders are we crossing as concepts that were once black and white muddle into gray? We enjoy the efficiency, but we fear a loss of control. We appreciate the immediacy, but we agonize over our personal boundaries. What about privacy? What about government control? What about AI infiltration or dominance or destruction? What about our own sense of who we are and why we are here? Just as Data wrestled with emotion and imagination, wasting long hours in holographic recreational adventures, we are living in a cultural upswing that is venturing into similar territory: If the AI assistants on our wrists, in our pockets, or clipped to our ears are capable of computing data for us instantly, what space do we have for creativity, imagination, and embracing the depths of human emotion? Data did not long to erase his robotic abilities in order to acquire emotional intelligence. Instead he installs an emotion chip to allow himself a full range of human emotions, an addition that initially proves difficult for him to absorb. In time, however, he learns to identify and balance his emotions, including an occasional choice to deactivate the emotion chip in order to ensure his performance efficiency. Clearly the question is not about exclusion but balance. When we are overloaded with one, we tend to neglect the other. Now that we have access to Data-level information, how do we ensure that we are handling well our fullest range of human emotions, imagination, and creativity?

Social Media

I looked at my seventh-grade teacher with my interested, quizzical face: head cocked slightly to one side, eyebrows furrowed, lips pursed. Beneath the desk that hid my

hands, I folded the paper again and again until it was hardly more than a speck in my palm. Leaning slightly to the right with a stretch of the shoulder, eyes still on Mr. Cole as he droned on about our upcoming osmosis experiment, I passed the speck to the row behind me. A moment or two passed, and then I felt a nudge in my left shoulder blade. I stretched my arm behind me, coupling it with a well-timed half-yawn, and folded my fingers over a meticulously folded scrap of paper. I opened the note noiselessly in my lap, eyes on the teacher. A few words and a googly-eyed silly face looked up at me, a response to my earlier taunt about the white bits of dandruff that speckled across our teacher's broad shoulders. My friends and I had passed notes since we learned to write in the first grade, and our process was slick, careful, and rarely exclusive; we encouraged newcomers who would occasionally pass random silliness around the room, giving us all an excuse to think about something beyond mastering the loops of a cursive G or memorizing facts about the Byzantine Empire. In Spanish and science, our notes often included test answers; in homeroom or choir, the notes typically gossiped about the teacher or some less-popular, unsuspecting peer. And the teachers rarely noticed – until this one day in seventh grade.

“May I see that, please?” Mr. Cole said, his eyes suddenly fully on me.

“See what?” I asked innocently, willing myself to disappear. I pressed the paper deeper into my palm, praying it would magically disintegrate into dust.

“Hand it to me, please,” Mr. Cole repeated, this time more sternly. I reached my hand toward him, palm up, eyes averted. He took the note and opened it slowly, fold after fold after fold. “Impressive,” he murmured as he finally opened the note fully, pressing it flat against the desk.

I felt my cheeks begin to burn as I imagined him reading aloud my unkind words exaggerating the white dandruff flakes I imagined sprinkled across the shoulders of his dark suit. I stared at the blue rubber toes of my duck shoes and waited for his wrath. Instead I heard a low chuckle followed by a grunt. I looked up. “You think so, huh?” Mr. Cole said. He brushed his fingers across a shoulder, pretending to look for dandruff, dropped the note in the trash with a laugh, and turned to the chalkboard to continue his lecture about solvent molecules and high solute concentrations. I sunk a little lower in my seat that day and vowed never to pass another note ... at least not about Mr. Cole.

As I have told my own kids many times, the challenge they face on social media is that the notes they pass are immortalized rather than tossed into a classroom wastebasket. In the 1970s and 1980s, our note-passing was frequent and not always kind, but the repercussions were fleeting. In the 21st-century, the note-passing is public, far-reaching, and permanent, and I am so sorry for a generation that must grapple with how best to manage their social relationships on a high, wide stage, with their parents, grandparents, teachers, and a cadre of other adults watching with arms crossed and criticism ready. When Data longed for emotional intelligence, his shipmates found his quest endearing, much like the Lion’s search for courage or the Tin Man’s quest for a heart in *The Wizard of Oz*. Why is it that we view social media as the unfortunate byproduct of a generation led astray, rather than recognizing the enormous benefits of such a vast array of social connections, as well as the brain-numbing dangers of its all-consuming appeal? Why is the church more interested in conversations about the decline of American culture than linking arms with those who are seeking a yellow brick road?

Every Thursday morning, my inbox zings with five emails in a row from [securely.com](#), a cloud-based web filtering service that our local public schools have employed to provide weekly parent reports on the Chromebook use of each of our children. While I understand the need for the prevention of inappropriate internet use, particularly regarding pornography or bullying, I find the weekly flurry of emails disturbingly reminiscent of a dystopian novel. The emails are each divided into four quadrants: (1) Sites Searched, (2) Educational Sites Searched, (3) Words Searched, and (4) Videos Searched. When a quadrant does not have links to list for that week, a cartoon sketch of an unhappy piece of paper appears with the words “There’s not enough data to display”; I always find that emoji-aided commentary amusing when it lands in the “Educational Sites Searched” box for one of my kids. What concerns me is that we are forcing our kids under nonstop plexiglass surveillance that we would never demand of ourselves. We seem to agree as a culture and as a church that failures and life struggles are character-building. Why, then, are we expecting perfection of a younger, Google-savvy generation? How are we stunting their ability to grow into healthy, forward-thinking, creative people when we are monitoring not only every step they take but every thought they think, redirecting and correcting until their actions are in line with our expectations and their souls are protected from the pain of loss? My prayer for my kids is that they fail well – preferably softly – while they are still living in my home. I delete the [securely.com](#) emails each week with an often irritated click of the touchpad. Until adults are content to live under the same level of magnifying glass, expressing humility and living lives of intentionality, I will not frustrate my children with the sins they have yet to commit.

I recently taught a course at our university titled “The Facts & Myths of Social Media,” and I was both startled and encouraged by the growth students experienced in our time together. In addition to their regular reading and writing assignments, I asked students each week to complete a different social media action and then share their results with the class. Some of the activities that garnered the richest discussions and realizations included the following:

- Track the time and frequency of your social media use for one 24-hour period.
- Select a single event in human history that occurred prior to 1990 and discuss with at least one other person the following: If social media had been around at the time of the event, would things have turned out differently?
- Track social media use during at least one planned professional or social event this week: a staff meeting, a working lunch, a family dinner, a social outing, etc. How often do you check a device during the event? How often do the others at the event check devices? Do the occasional device-checks enhance or detract from the meeting?
- Find 15 minutes to be bored – no internet, no texts, no email, no TV, no devices nearby. Sit outside, sit by a window, or sit in a cozy corner. Enjoy a cup of coffee or tea and a few moments of solitude.
- Choose an activity this week that is counter-cultural. For example, post a moment when life is not perfect, remind friends seeking affirmation that

you appreciate them for who they are rather than their scripted images, or stick up for someone who is being shamed.

- Pick an action this week that you would ordinarily handle via social media or internet and instead reach out in person: a work message, a check-in with family or friends, a service industry contact, etc.

The learning students gained in our time together was twofold: (1) They learned that they individually spend far more mindless, unintentional time on social media than they realized, and (2) they learned that social media, when used well, is enormously beneficial for a seeking, longing, and hurting culture. As Christian pastors and leaders, how might we fare? Rather than dictating from on high, how do we, too, learn to enter in so we are able to appreciate the benefits of social media and offer guidance where older generations, in particular, may have diverted our attention to inconsequential?

Worldview

My first realization of worldview came in my later toddler years, as it does for many people. We were living in an apartment in Detroit, Michigan, and a gaggle of neighbor kids were eating Kool-Aid powder straight from the rainbow-colored packets. I shudder now at the thought of dyed chemicals without the multiple cups of bleached sugar that made the drink palatable once it was mixed with water, but somehow this was appealing to kids in our apartment complex. I accepted when they offered, curious as usual, and while I don't recall the taste, I do remember realizing that my parents likely would not approve. Directions were to be followed, and surely we should not be dipping our fingers into packets of Kool-Aid powder that had not yet been mixed into a delicious

drink. Later that day, I was startled when I heard my mother's voice calling to me from an upper-story window when we dashed across the apartment building's courtyard. I paused and looked up to see what she needed, and I remember feeling deeply surprised that she had any ideas at all about Kool-Aid consumption. I don't recall her words, but I do know that she asked me several times whether I had been eating Kool-Aid powder. I told her "no" insistently, surprised that she would keep asking. I had resolved to keep it to myself, effectively rewriting reality in my own mind to clear my conscience, and I didn't understand why we needed to go back to something I had already moved beyond. I was later disciplined for my dishonesty, and I remember realizing in that experience that I must not hold as much power as I thought. While my worldview was now unique from my mother's, a fact I was enjoying as I was given increasingly more freedom to explore the world without her continual supervision, I realized with some disappointment that her worldview was equally unique from mine.

Those of us who have raised children know that an infant's worldview is firmly intertwined with his or her mother's – so much so that the infant does not view itself as uniquely individual and is daily startled when the mother does not anticipate the discomforts of life that she surely must be feeling as well: the stabbing pains of hunger, the heaviness of fatigue, the cold dampness of a diaper that needs to be changed. As an older baby differentiates from the mother, an early understanding of worldview begins to form at its most basic level: My eyes are mine alone, which means I must point to or use words to describe the things that I see, want, prefer, or fear; those around me do not automatically see what I see. As a child grows and recognizes the power of storytelling, as I had begun to when I encountered Kool-Aid powder at nearly age three, worldview

becomes something that is potentially pliable – both from my view and from yours. Or is it? The lines are gray, and as we mature, we subconsciously settle into the ethical, social, and cultural boundaries that most comfortably affirm who we are and who we hope to become. But when we are not aware of or intentional about the lines we draw, ethical quandaries can arise that surprise and confuse us.

The definition of worldview is simple: It is the lens through which we see the world. What becomes complicated is our ability to acknowledge the lens exists, our willingness to articulate what defines our unique lens, and our interest in encountering with grace, humility, and openness the lenses of those around us. Too often we assume that we have no lens, much as we have no discernible accent – everyone else has the accent. Or we assume that lenses come in like-colored packages, and ours matches nicely the lenses of the people we have chosen to live life alongside. But both assumptions are gravely, dangerously wrong: Everyone has a worldview lens, and everyone's lens is uniquely informed by his or her experiences, surroundings, and innate tendencies.

We had a discussion in our church recently about worldview and how best to engage those whose worldview may differ from ours – an admirable conversation but one that I found concerning when it overlooked the fact that an ability to articulate one's own worldview is the first essential step. In our church discussion, we weighed ideas of secularism, postmodernism, and eastern religions and philosophies, but I began to hear an overarching assumption that a “Christian worldview” was something that the more than 100 of us gathered in that room shared in common. The difficulty in assuming we understand the worldview lens through which someone else encounters the world is that we will always, always be disappointed. While I may share a number of theological

understandings with my pastor, for example, the fact that he is male, younger than I am, and grew up in another state is enough to shade our worldview lenses with remarkably different colors. I have no trouble with the differences – we should all embrace the richness of our differences – but I cannot expect to communicate with him as if our like-minded theology informs all of who we are; if I do, what nuance might I imply or words might I use that could mislead or offend? And if I mislead or offend and I am never aware that I have, what happens to our communication both in that moment and over the long term?

In the Christian Faith & Thought course, I often ask students to role play various worldviews, answering challenging life questions from the lens of that worldview to see how it might differ from their own beliefs. The students each place a worldview name on a card before them: Individualism, Consumerism, Nationalism, Moral Relativism, Scientific Naturalism, New Age, Postmodern, Christian, etc. We then ask one another questions such as, “What happens when I die?” or “What is the purpose of human life on earth?” and work to answer as accurately as possible by our understanding of the worldview at hand. Students struggle and laugh their way through this exercise, typically defaulting to what sounds most rational and obvious in their own minds, but they walk away with an appreciation of the variety of lenses that surround us. I encourage them to recognize that the most problematic way to encounter life is to live it without examination. The hidden shades of our worldview lenses that we either don’t see or refuse to recognize invariably are the particulates that dilute or infect our lives in deeply troubling ways that we may never realize.

A discussion about worldview should never begin with an assumption of solidarity and a vaguely condescending determination to understand the differing worldviews of those around us. It can take a lifetime to identify, articulate, heal, and teach from our own worldviews, and it would behoove us to start there. Some of the factors we each need to consider include age, gender, race, class, education, religion, culture, location, occupation, hobbies, friends, and family.

Postmodernism

I was raised in a home that favored science over religion, rational thought over spiritual mysticism. We had one Bible in our home, and it sat mostly untouched on a shelf in the family room. We attended church fairly regularly throughout my childhood, but I was schooled to hold my discussions about faith and Jesus to Sunday mornings rather than spread religion across the week in a cultish, overbearing kind of way. When a group of “evangelists” visited a summer camp that I attended each year, I remember my family explaining to me that while they were likely very nice people, “evangelists” tended to be much too extreme in their approach to faith and religion, and that one should always be wary of the cost. As educated people, we could only carry religion a certain distance in our lives before it would start to impede our ability to think creatively and otherwise contribute intelligently to society. Religion compartmentalized to Sunday mornings was an organized way to assure our Christianity but leave ample room for intellectual gain, productivity, and achievement. The philosophy made sense to me at its most basic level, but as I grew older and explored Scripture on my own, I began to

question how one could experience Christianity only slightly, retaining control and maintaining a careful distance; was it possible that this was not Christianity at all?

One Saturday afternoon when I had pulled pizzas from the oven and a number of neighboring kids happened to have mixed in with mine as we sat down for a late lunch, I asked everyone to pause briefly so my daughter could pray before our meal together.

“Wait a minute,” a 12-year-old boy interrupted. “I’m atheist. I’m really not comfortable with this.”

“Marcus,” I said quietly. “It will be painless. You don’t need to close your eyes or do anything. Just hold tight for a moment, and before you know it, she’ll be done.”

Marcus’ eyes widened with surprise as we continued despite his protest, and as we dished up the pizza a few moments later, I asked him how that felt.

“I guess it didn’t really matter,” he said. “I just believe in science instead of God.”

“Instead of?” my son, also 12, interrupted incredulously. “That’s ridiculous. God created science. I believe in both.”

Marcus and my son continued a lively discussion of whether something can exist if it cannot be seen, touched, or validated scientifically, and I listened, relieved to hear my son’s confident response and intrigued by Marcus’ questions. Here was the postmodern worldview encapsulated in a middle school boy’s aversion to prayer, followed by an immediate challenge to rationally prove a belief system that Americans many generations ago took for granted as foundational. Just as I was raised with a notably postmodern worldview, the one lens that my students struggle the most to acknowledge, identify, and articulate is postmodernism – likely because we live so deeply entrenched in its assumptions that it is difficult for us to think beyond its limitations.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modernism emerged as a response to the vast cultural changes of the Industrial Revolution: a call for a movement that was fresh, engaged, and meaningful in a newly industrialized world. In the mid- to late 20th century, postmodernism emerged as a response to modernism: an inherent rejection of unified movements of any kind, including religion, tradition, nationalism, and cultural expectation. Postmodernism is marked by deeply seeded skepticism and a reverence for scientific validation. Some critics have called for a movement beyond postmodernism into a kind of neo-postmodernism or neomodernism, which suggests that some of postmodernism's claims for equality, scientific authority, and non-conformity at all costs are self-defeating. While neomodernism raises effective questions, postmodernism is so deeply entrenched in our language and culture that it is difficult to conceptualize how a new way forward will rewrite our western American worldview. A lasting revision of postmodernism will surely be driven by the far-reaching changes in technology and communication in the early 21st century.

As congregation members in our church discussion wrestled with definitions of worldview, the anchors of each definition emerged from a postmodern skepticism that most did not seem to notice: "Can the worldview be defined in a rational, discernible manner?" the pastor asked. And, "Are the tenants of the worldview supported by experience, whether by the individual or the group?" Our American culture has become so deeply mired in postmodernism since the mid-20th century that it is difficult for us to imagine a world where emotion is revered, adherence to the norm is preferred, and mystical experiences are the beacons of proof. Fredric Jameson argued in his 1972 book *The Prison-House of Language* that cultural swings are often indicative of linguistic

limitations and unique modes of experience. Instead of standing in moralistic opposition, what if we analyze cultural phenomenon such as social media or a post-church trend, maintaining a sensitivity toward the markers and linguistic trends that limit our ability to imagine more fully? How do we help our culture resist the myopic limitations of us-versus-them and other non-biblical entrapments that smack of postmodernism?

Marshall McLuhan, an English professor whose theories of media and culture were profoundly influential in the 1960s and 1970s, argued that a broader understanding of meaning should come from the medium itself rather than the content: “The ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs,” McLuhan wrote in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.¹⁵⁶ When we are consumed by moral arguments about a 21st-century social media whose content we find offensive, in other words, we are missing the point of the larger cultural swing; we are succumbing to the us-versus-them that rarely allows for progressive thought or even adequate understanding. In Quentin Fiore’s image-laden reworking of McLuhan’s text as *The Medium is the Massage*, we see echoes of cultural conflict that hold eerily true today: “Environments are invisible. Their groundrules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns elude easy perception,” McLuhan writes on one code-free white double-truck page.¹⁵⁷ And later, on a page stamped with a black-and-white silhouette of figures prancing across a field in a Dance of Death, McLuhan writes, “Our official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old.”¹⁵⁸ Our

¹⁵⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; repr., Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2015), 20.

¹⁵⁷ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 1996), 84-85.

¹⁵⁸ McLuhan and Fiore, 94.

responsibility here is unwavering: We are called to love God, love our neighbor, love our enemies, and go and make disciples of all nations. To begin to free ourselves from the myopic prison-house of our own postmodern cultural restraints, we must be humble, vulnerable, and Holy Spirit-reliant.



Photo by [Ben White](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Chapter 2: The 20th-Century Answer

The cool, hard wood pressed into my thighs as I sat on the edge of the pew, dangling my legs and peering between the adult heads in front of me as I wondered who would emerge from the mysterious door to the left of the pulpit. I knew the space behind the door was only a narrow hallway lined with wheeled garment racks, the polyester robes clocking on their wire hangers, but I liked to imagine a Lewisian portal into the snowy woods of Narnia or some other adventure-filled escape. When the door creaked open, what emerged was magical, just as I had hoped. I leaned into the center aisle for a better view, holding onto the hymn rack on the pew in front of me so I wouldn't fall. The man who walked out was stooped, his graying hair long and wavy across his shoulders. He wore a dark tunic that fell in folds around his heavyset frame, with a corded rope cinched around his belly. When he walked haltingly forward, I could see that his feet were bare beneath the tunic, and the clatter of chains cut through the sanctuary with each step. He shuffled to the pulpit and stood to one side, his left hand gripping the wood and his right hand outstretched. Chains shackled both his wrists and his ankles. When he

spoke, his voice boomed to the back of the sanctuary and forward again, transporting us to the Mamertime Prison in Rome where Paul was waiting and writing.

I was mesmerized by our pastor's ability to become someone else for a time, presenting that individual to us in full costume and character rather than standing behind the pulpit to deliver yet another boring string of adult ideas knit together by long pauses and polite coughs in the audience. He didn't perform for us every Sunday, as I wished he would, but every month or two he would surprise us with some new storytelling adventure. Most mornings he could be found wandering in the hallways in his black robe and deep red stole, chatting with congregation members as they arrived. When he was notably absent, I knew we were in for a treat.

But despite his thespian talent, he was one of those adults who looked slightly over one's head when he said hello – maybe not always in actuality, but always in sentiment. I semi-dreaded the close of church each Sunday when we would all file into the inner aisle between the pews, waiting to exit through the thick wooden front doors of the church as the pastor greeted each of us with an energetic handshake. His black robe covered my hand, too, when he reached forward, and I was never quite sure whether he knew my name even though our family had attended that church for more than a decade. As a child, I only half-listened from the back seat of our Jeep Wagoneer, pressed between two older brothers, as my parents discussed his sermons on the way home. Sometimes they agreed, sometimes they disagreed, and for a time, something deeper added an air of anxiety to our post-church drives. I later learned that our pastor had an extramarital affair with a deacon in the church, and both he and the deacon chose to leave their spouses so they could marry one another. While I understood the fallibility of people and the

complexity of life choices even at a younger age, I have always had a difficult time witnessing secrecy, deceit, and untruth. I realized over the years that the reason my mother preferred our pastor's regular sermons to his dramatic monologues was that the former pressed him closer to humility and honesty, while the latter allowed the fiction that had threatened to dismantle the church around him. I am certain that he preferred the drama, despite the prep work it must have required. When he was someone else, he no longer had to apologize or defend or pretend not to see; each time he became someone else, he had a clean slate.

One of my most prized necklaces is a simple silver chain with a Chinese 50-yen coin hanging from it. The coin is a reminder of a lunch conversation my best friend and I had in our teen years with a woman who was a missionary to China. My grandmother had arranged the luncheon so we could meet the woman and hear her story, and we four sat together at a sun-dappled table eating BLTs and listening to this woman's tales of hard choices, painful sacrifices, and deep faith. Both my friend and I were startled by her practical sense of calling, coupled with a no-nonsense determination to continually move forward in the purpose she believed God had called her to. We were both searching, wondering about future jobs and future homes and future families, and this woman brought a compelling sense of mission as more than just a missionary's calling. As a parting gift, the woman gave my friend and I each a silver Chinese coin, and my friend later gave me a necklace to hang the coin from as a reminder of the purpose and inspiration we experienced that day. When my friend was tragically murdered many years later, the necklace became an even more precious reminder of the miraculous gift

of peace, joy, and hope that we are called to share with all we are privileged to encounter. In both the missionary's story and in my friend's horribly premature death, the fanfare is stripped away until what remains is our humanity against a backdrop of God's brilliance. The older I got, the less I understood the showmanship of my childhood pastor and the more I longed for the intentionality and humility of a missionary's life. But did that always mean an airline ticket to somewhere across the globe, or was Jesus suggesting something more?

Redefining the Mission Field

The earliest roots of the missional movement began with conversations in the early 20th century about missionary methods that were deemed too reliant on western superiority.¹⁵⁹ As this healthy look at missionary ecclesiology spread, writers/theologians such as Darrell Guder, Ed Stetzer, Tim Keller, and Alan Hirsch carried the conversation into a broader church context in the late 20th century, calling for a missional church. And while the missional movement was founded on good intentions, its definitions lack clarity – an ongoing omission that could lead to the movement's demise unless we step forward with practical, assessable tools. Consider, for example, J. Todd Billings' call for a clearer articulation of purpose in his 2008 *Christianity Today* article titled "What Makes a Church Missional?":

Some use *missional* to describe a church that rejects treating the gospel like a commodity for spiritual consumers; others frame it as a strategy for marketing the church and stimulating church growth. Some see the missional church as a refocusing on God's action in the world rather than obsessing over individuals'

¹⁵⁹ Scott Aniol, "A Brief History of the Missional Church Movement," *Religious Affections Ministries*, accessed April 23, 2016, <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-church/a-brief-history-of-the-missional-church-movement/>.

needs; others see it as an opportunity to “meet people where they are” and reinvent the church for postmodern culture. Clearly, we need to examine the range of perspectives hiding under the term *missional* if we’re to make use of insights learned in the missional-church discussion.¹⁶⁰

Editor Darrell L. Guder’s multi-authored 1998 volume titled *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* is typically considered the focal point from which today’s definitions of “missional” have emerged. In *Missional Church*, we find a discussion of Christendom-focused Christianity, cultural privilege at play in the church, internal-focused church structure, *mission dei*, Lesslie Newbigin’s missional focus, and a new emphasis on believers sent into the world to share the Gospel. Guder notes in Chapter 9 that the movement of this new church should be ever-outward: “The theological formation of the missional connectedness of the church should be centrifugal in nature,” he argues.¹⁶¹

In their book *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile attempt to bring clarity to the muddled definition of “missional.” Their answer, generally speaking, is to allow the fluidity for a broader application in a variety of situations: “Some argue today ... that the word ‘missional’ has become vacuous and has thus lost its definitional value. We are proposing a different argument in this book, namely, that ‘missional’ displays an inherent elasticity that allows it to be understood in a variety of ways.”¹⁶² Perhaps, although how will a nonbelieving audience encounter such elasticity, particularly when they are predisposed to skepticism, hurt, and even hatred? In

¹⁶⁰ J. Todd Billings, “What Makes a Church Missional?” *Christianity Today* 52, no. 3 (March 2008): 56, accessed April 22, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/march/16.56.html>.

¹⁶¹ Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 249.

¹⁶² Van Gelder and Zscheile, 3.

Introducing the Missional Church, Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren include a subheading that reads, “How the Missional Church Transcends Categorization.”¹⁶³

Roxburgh writes in his 2011 book *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* that part of the missional movement centers on a new way of seeing the world around us: “An important part of joining with God in mission-shaped life is learning to see again with fresh eyes, to wake up to the fresh and not-so-obvious ways God is present. How might we learn to see our neighborhood through God’s eyes and become detectives of God’s life in our neighbors and the activities of the streets where we live?”¹⁶⁴ The missional movement has done well to redefine the mission field as far more than a life dedicated to work in China, as my necklace reminds me, or a morning spent serving vegetables at a local soup kitchen. When Jesus commands us to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,”¹⁶⁵ he does not suggest that we leave our neighborhoods in order to begin; nor does he command that we stay in our neighborhoods and worship together in large, vacuous, ornate, pious buildings. Jesus simply commands that we go.

In *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, Alan Hirsch argues that the church’s step “to the edge of chaos” may actually be a positive move:

There are signs of real movement going on. One of the more obvious signs is the sense of holy discontent among Christians of all ages and classes – it’s not just the younger generations that are asking questions. Even the boomers are asking, “Has it all come down to this? Attending church services, singing songs to God, and attending cell groups? Is this really what Christianity is all about?” But more disquieting perhaps is that there is a mass exodus from the church: remember the research of David Barrett and Todd Johnson that there are 111 million Christians

¹⁶³ Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 49.

¹⁶⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 183.

¹⁶⁵ Matt. 28:18.

without a local church in the world today. These people claim to take Jesus seriously but feel alienated from current expressions of church. We all know them, don't we? My own experience tells me that there are more Christians aged twenty-something outside the church than inside the church at any given time. The statistics and premonitions must say something to us, and they are not unnecessarily gloomy. What they tell us is that there is a search going on. This search for alternatives is a sign that the system is responding, and it has led to significant experimentation, and eventually to some genuine innovation.¹⁶⁶

What the missional movement has allowed is a recognition of our privileged position as we seek to follow the Great Commission. The advent of both the Google age and a post-Christian worldview, however, demand a new kind of conversation that is keenly direct, transparent, and genuine. As we encourage the missional movement, are we adequately preparing pastors and disciples for a 21st-century society that eschews muddled reasoning and hypocrisy even more than its predecessors?

Redefining the Missionaries

If we step more fully into the 21st-century continuing our discussions of clarity, defending our intentions and ideals but never really gaining any traction, Mike Breen's aptly titled 2011 article could come to fruition: "Why the Missional Movement Will Fail." Breen argues that the missional movement is repeating the doomed slide of so many previous efforts in the western church; while the ideals are admirable, the inner workings are not primed for traction: "They are a car without an engine," Breen writes. "A missional church or a missional community or a missional small group is the new car that everyone is talking about right now, but no matter how beautiful or shiny the vehicle,

¹⁶⁶ Alan J. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 268.

without the engine, it won't go anywhere.”¹⁶⁷ Breen calls for more intentional discipleship training. Missional work sends people into a spiritual war zone, Breen argues, and without both a boot camp for training and a hospital for recovery, it's no wonder that the movement itself is spinning its wheels: “When we don't disciple people the way Jesus and the New Testament talked about, we are sending them out without armor, weapons or training. This is mass carnage waiting to happen. How can we be surprised that people burn out, quit and never want to return to the missional life (or the church)? How can we not expect people who will feel used and abused?”¹⁶⁸

In his foreword to Hirsch and Catchim's *The Permanent Revolution*, Darrell L. Guder acknowledges that the term “missional” gained popularity after the publication of his 1998 compilation *Missional Church* but quickly blew astray: “The term immediately became a cliché that today means everything or nothing.”¹⁶⁹ Interestingly, it is Breen who attempts to bring some clarity to the conversation by contributing a section to Hirsch and Catchim's 2012 book. In his introduction of the APEST ministries, Breen suggests that these ascension gifts are a means of clarifying New Testament language in a way that is accessible and assessable for contemporary ministry efforts. Breen defines the APEST ministries as follows:

- The *apostle* is tasked with the overall vigor, as well as extension of Christianity as a whole, primarily through direct mission and church planting. As the name itself suggests, it is the quintessentially missional ministry, as “sentness” (Latin *mission*) is written into it (*apostello* = sent one).

¹⁶⁷ Mike Breen, “Why the Missional Movement Will Fail,” *Verge*, September 14, 2011, accessed April 22, 2016, www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/14/mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Hirsch and Catchim, xv.

- The *prophet* is called to maintain faithfulness to God among the people of God. Essentially prophets are guardians of the covenant relationship.
- The *evangelist* is the recruiter to the cause, the naturally infectious person who is able to enlist people into the movement by transmitting the gospel.
- The *shepherd* (pastor) is called to nurture spiritual development, maintain communal health, and engender loving community among the people of God.
- The *teacher* mediates wisdom and understanding. This philosophical type brings comprehensive understanding of the revelation bequeathed to the church.¹⁷⁰

Breen's efforts here are laudable, but the conclusions in *The Permanent Revolution* echo the same circular searching for definition that we have seen since Guder's *Missional Church*. If, for example, a prophet is called to maintain faithfulness, or an evangelist is "the naturally infectious person," who will more precisely define these terms to prevent the infighting that invariably will follow? If we agree to divide into roles, who will decide who fits into which, and how will we heal the wounds of those who do not fit at all?

In my not-yet-educated teenage brain, a "missionary" was someone who went on mission somewhere far away from home, sometimes for a week or two and sometimes for a lifetime. Interestingly, the people I have admired most in my life have nearly always been missionaries in the classic sense of the word: from the woman who dedicated her life to rural villages in China; to a couple who spent a lifetime serving a small village in Ethiopia, translating the Bible into the Anuak language; to parents who raised their children in both Tartarstan, Russia, and the United States; to a family who left the comforts of their home in the lower continental United States to move to a remote village near the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska to serve the Alutiiq people. I

¹⁷⁰ Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 8.

initially thought I admired the sacrifice of traveling far from home, risking a loss of comfort, structure, and familiarity, but I have since realized that these allowances are not the more difficult piece of the equation. While opening ourselves to physical discomfort can be admirable, the greater challenge is living a life of intentionality, humility, and complete reliance on a Creator who has far greater plans than we can ever devise. What complexities are we reinforcing when we encourage our pastors and Christian leaders to memorize Scripture, recite the Confessions, and learn to manage mission-driven, orderly church systems, when really what the Great Commission is calling us to is the barest humanity that we can imagine? When the discomfort is not just physical but psychological and emotional as well, are we up to the task?

In the late 1980s, I spent a month living on a Dunkard Brethren mission on a Navajo reservation in north central New Mexico. The couple who were called to start the mission had lived there for 30-some years at that point, raising their three children and then welcoming grand children as the mission field that was once foreign had firmly become their family's home. When we ate meals together, alternating between serving and receiving, Anglo and Navajo, there were no pretenses or spaces for hiding. If there were ideas to discuss or stories to share, we talked as we ate, sometimes laughing and sometimes debating. And if there was little news since the previous meal just a few hours prior, we ate silently, rising to help with dishes when everyone had finished and moving back into our daily duties until the next meal. When we went sledding together one brisk January night, I was relieved to join the women in adding trousers beneath our ankle-length skirts for protection against the frigid desert air. There was no tension among the

20 or more people who traveled to the sledding hill together, as emotional responses were handled quickly and directly until all were appeased. Instead the missionaries and the Navajo people alike had an enormous capacity for joy in the moment, and a deep-set, peace-filled confidence in their purpose on the earth. And when a friend and I were trapped in our 15-passenger van by a turkey who threatened to attack each time we began to click open a door, we did not think to blame the residents who owned the turkey and let him run wild, or the turkey itself for its surprising aggression, or the woman who had sent us out to hogans to take a census of the people on the reservation. Instead we laughed and tapped at our windows and wondered aloud how a turkey could possibly stretch himself taller than five feet high in order to intimidate us back into the van; instead we enjoyed the moment and left the errant details up to God. And while my blood pressure likely shot up a bit each time that turkey widened its grisly eyes and ran straight towards the van door where I sat, I so appreciated my friend's ability to be humble, transparent, bold, and joyful in a single moment.

Considering the Paradox

In his 2010 book *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already*

There, Leonard Sweet argues for a new kind of missional:

The church has been more prone to “take a stand” on issues or “take a vote” on programs than touch. Touch is a centripetal force that includes and embraces. Taking stands is a centrifugal force that separates and divides. While the rest of the world is moving, the one taking a stand is frozen in time like kids playing freeze tag, waiting for the sign that says it's okay to move again. Christ ran around touching people and tagging them. Every Jesus tag offered freedom. Every Jesus tag let the person tagged know they had been touched by God.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 242.

The Pharisees operated by centrifugal force; Jesus perpetuates a centripetal force. As a church, we know this, and yet our efforts to stand for truth in the twenty-first century invariably repel rather than attract. According to Dan Kimball, we are at a point where we need to offer both an apology and an apologetic: “While we need to stand strong on what we believe and need not be ashamed of the gospel in any way, we need to make sure we are presenting a biblical picture of the church and not perpetuating negative stereotypes. We need to offer an apologetic to correct misperceptions.”¹⁷²

In 1989, I toured the Portland Oregon Mormon Temple before it was formally dedicated and closed to non-Mormons. The Temple sits on seven acres in Lake Oswego with six spires rising from a marble exterior and green slate roof with a gold-leafed statue of the angel Moroni on top of the 170-foot eastern spire. To enter through the south doors, we pulled paper slippers on over our shoes and were asked not to touch anything as we were guided through the hallways of the nearly 80,000-square-foot interior. We wandered through room after room of dramatic white marble, chandeliers, full-wall tapestries, and gold statues. Our guide told us that once the building was dedicated and operational, not only would non-Mormons be forbidden entry but only Mormons of particular stature according to age, gender, and accomplishments would be permitted to step into many of the rooms of the temple. It was difficult not to emerge weighted by both the exorbitant cost and the focus on exclusive works-based admission. I drove away relieved to not be entrapped by the assumptions, dictates, and prophecies of a belief system that did not align with biblical truths. Yet was my relief any different from a

¹⁷² Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 250.

nonbeliever who has engaged with a Christian? Perhaps the most challenging paradox we face is the biblical call to both share the Gospel and extend love that surpasses the language we use to describe who Jesus was. Do we tell the story? Do we love our neighbor and our enemy? Do we know how to do all of this at once without self-consciousness or personal baggage or erroneous assumptions about the people we encounter? Do we know how to live in the psychological and emotional discomfort of Christianity's paradox?

As Sweet argues in *Me and We: God's New Social Gospel*, the world's structural problems will remain as long as the individual human heart is ailing: "The [social gospel] movement's demise has been the subject of vast speculation and scrutiny, but it can be seen perhaps best this way: social gospelers tried to save an ailing turtle by switching out its shell, one embossed with the name 'Christianity.'"¹⁷³ The missional movement is in danger of a similar end. If we don't pause in our discussion of the core ideas of missiology to consider how individual hearts can be strengthened and encouraged, missional ideas will never rise from rhetoric to reality. According to Gillian Tett, understanding the "messy gaps between rhetoric and reality" is critical: "Life does not always fit into the official descriptions of what people are *supposed* to do. Much of the time we ignore these messy realities."¹⁷⁴ How, then, do we ensure that our discussion of missional church adequately prepares, equips, and strengthens the hearts of those who are sent to disciple? Are we embarking on missions – both around the globe and across the

¹⁷³ Leonard Sweet, *Me and We: God's New Social Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 3.

¹⁷⁴ Gillian Tett, *The Silo Effect: The Peril of Expertise and the Promise of Breaking Down Barriers* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 224.

street – without properly training disciples? Peter Scazzero writes that a healthy understanding of self is essential: “The vast majority of us go to our graves without knowing who we are. We unconsciously live someone else’s life, or at least someone else’s expectations for us. This does violence to ourselves, our relationship with God, and ultimately others.”¹⁷⁵ In an effort to extend the missional conversation and keep the movement alive, an examination of individual EQ and AQ is an essential next step.

Redefining Jesus

The scriptural underpinnings of the missional movement rest primarily in the Great Commission: “Then Jesus came to [the disciples] and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”¹⁷⁶ But two problems are confronting us as we try to live into Jesus’ commissioning: (1) We don’t fully believe in our own authority and ability to do what Jesus is asking of us, and (2) We don’t understand how to effectively speak to “all nations.” In other words, while our godly purpose may make sense to us intellectually, we are not properly equipped to live into it. As Mark Galli argues in *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God*, when we begin to rationalize Jesus, we render the Great Commission vacuous and ineffective:

¹⁷⁵ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It’s Impossible to be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006) 66.

¹⁷⁶ Matt. 28:18-20.

We avoid the reality of Christ's power in a number of ways. For instance, we're tempted to spiritualize his power, to reduce the elemental potency and energy to a moment of personal religious inspiration. The stilling of the storm is about psychological storms in our lives. The healing of the lame is about solving emotional problems that cripple us. Jesus bringing sight to the blind is about God's ability to help us see our lives clearly. And so on and so forth. If we do that enough, we begin to think the Gospel stories are nothing but metaphors, and metaphors primarily about us."¹⁷⁷

How do we rescue Jesus' meaning "from the barnacles that have attached themselves to it over the centuries"?¹⁷⁸

As Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch argue in *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for Missional Church*, we need a recalibration – a reboot back to Jesus: "Christology is the key to the renewal of the church in every age and in every possible situation it might find itself."¹⁷⁹ In our effort to recalibrate, what if we ground ourselves in the Scripture that begins Jesus' ministry before we turn with confidence to the commission that ends it? When Jesus returns to Galilee after his time in the desert, we witness his first public act and a remarkable demonstration of his life's purpose:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

¹⁷⁷ Mark Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 113.

¹⁷⁸ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 343.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 42.

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”¹⁸⁰

While some theologians argue that this Sabbath message may not have been Jesus' inaugural sermon,¹⁸¹ the content is more important than the chronology: First, Jesus grounds his words in Isaiah, Scripture that his audience already knew, trusted, and believed; rather than appealing to his audience with what they might consider his own wisdom, emotion, or story, Jesus relies on the truth of God's word to introduce him to those in attendance. Second, Jesus announces with confidence, using the prophet's poetry, that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed him. Jesus does not waver, question, or wonder; he knows who he is, and he steps forward boldly. Third, Jesus states that his God-given purpose is singular and simple: to proclaim the Gospel. Again, he does not waver, question, or wonder; God gave him a purpose, and he announces to the gathered listeners that his purpose is to proclaim to the poor the good news that he has come to offer. Fourth, Jesus articulates clearly the content of his purpose: to free the imprisoned and oppressed, to offer sight to the blind, and to usher in an ongoing Year of Jubilee. Jesus does not equivocate or justify; he boldly proclaims. Finally, Jesus announces that the Messianic prophecy he has just read aloud is his to fulfill in this very moment, an announcement that arouses anger and suspicion among his listeners.

In books such as Jeff Vanderstelt's *Saturate* and Kara Powell's *Sticky Faith*, I see an earnest searching that should be fostered and affirmed – a searching not unlike that of

¹⁸⁰ Luke 4:16-21.

¹⁸¹ Laurence E. Porter, “Luke,” *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, Ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 1151.

the nonbeliever who pours his money into finite satisfactions or flits from relationship to relationship. If we are searching for *what*, our answer is Jesus; and if we are searching for *how*, our answer is the same: Jesus. In his book *Happy Church: Pursuing Radical Joy as the People of God*, Tim McConnell calls for joy: “God intends to make his promises come true, to create pockets of happy people in this world – people whose joy serves his purposes for his glory.”¹⁸² Yes, but how? In *It’s Not What You Think: Why Christianity Is About So Much More Than Going to Heaven When You Die*, Jefferson Bethke reminds us of the importance of a shared meal: “The reason table and intimacy and story and temple and Sabbath are so important is that they are relational. You can’t tell a story unless you have relationship with your listeners. You can’t have intimacy without another person. You can’t enjoy the power of the table unless other people are there.”¹⁸³ Yes, but how? Philip Yancey asks in *What Good is God?* what role faith can play in a world where tragedies confront us daily. In a chapter titled “I Wish I’d Known,” Yancey admits that he once had it all wrong: “I came to this school with a distorted image of God, as a frowning Supercop looking to squash anyone who might be having a good time. How wrong I was.”¹⁸⁴ When our view is muddled by the complexity of being human, we typically have taken our eyes off of the *what* and the *how* of Jesus. When Jesus stood up to read in the Nazareth synagogue at the onset of his ministry, he turned to his Old Testament foundation, he pronounced his anointment by the Spirit of the Lord, and he proclaimed his purpose. He did not equivocate because both his sense of self and his

¹⁸² Tim McConnell, *Happy Church: Pursuing Radical Joy as the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁸³ Jefferson Bethke, *It’s Not What You Think: Why Christianity Is About So Much More Than Going to Heaven When You Die* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), 195.

¹⁸⁴ Philip Yancey, *What Good is God? In Search of a Faith That Matters* (New York, NY: FaithWords, 2010), 136.

awareness of audience were exquisite. As John Ortberg writes in his foreword to Mark Labberton's *The Dangerous Act of Worship*, the answer need not be complicated:

The prophet Micah said a long time ago that the divine requirements for human life are not rocket science: Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before your God. Worship is the humble walk. It is the knee-buckling, jaw-dropping acknowledgement of the gap between the creature and the Creator, the finite and the Infinite, the sinful and the Holy. It is the heart-rending, spirit-mending gratitude and joy of those who have tasted the wonder that words like *redemption* can only hint at.¹⁸⁵

The missional movement needs a recalibration back to the simplest answer: Jesus. If the life metaphor is a game of tag, as Sweet suggests in *Nudge*, a clear sense of self (EQ) and an empathetic understanding of audience (AQ) will free us to race around tagging others rather than standing frozen, waiting for something we cannot articulate. “Every Jesus tag offered freedom”.¹⁸⁶ Surely we are called to the same.

¹⁸⁵ Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 9.

¹⁸⁶ Sweet, *Nudge*, 242.



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Chapter 3: A 21st-Century Sensibility

“Do you believe in God?” Tom Hanks asks Meg Ryan’s character Patricia in the 1990 cult classic *Joe Versus the Volcano*. Joe Banks and Patricia Graynamore are floating on a private luxury yacht in the South Pacific, reclining alone under the stars and pondering the purpose of life.

“I believe in myself,” Patricia answers.

“What does that mean?” Joe asks.

She smiles. “I have confidence in myself.”

Joe nods. “I have been doing some soul searching lately, been asking myself some pretty tough questions. And do you know what I found out?” he asks. Patricia smiles and shakes her head. “I have no interest in myself,” Joe says. “I start thinking about myself, and I get bored out of my mind.”

Patricia laughs. “Well, what *does* interest you?” she asks.

“I don’t know,” Joe says, pondering. And then, with a look of surprise, he realizes his answer: “Courage,” he says firmly. “Courage interests me.”¹⁸⁷

As the picturesque ocean scene swells into chaos, sinking the yacht and leaving the two afloat under the hot sun on four steamer trunks, Joe’s interest in courage becomes an uncompromising obsession. He had demonstrated little courage in his years working in a dreary factory on Staten Island, and now that he has tapped into it, courage becomes the purpose that drives every decision he makes. As per Patricia’s self-confidence, she later bemoans a life lived not by her own choices but by the promises and bribes of her father; the self-confidence she proclaimed so quickly is clearly a farce.

But together the two are seeking, and together they discover an initial awareness that is such a critical part of the journey: “My father says that almost the whole world is asleep – everybody you know, everybody you see, everybody you talk to,” Patricia tells Joe. “He says that only a few people are awake, and they live in a state of constant total amazement.”¹⁸⁸ The edginess of this Beckettesque film demands that we wake up to the oddities, the pressing questions, and the curious humor of a life lived with intentionality rather than in a daze.

As we have moved into the 21st century and technology has allowed us to communicate with and observe one another in ways that we never imagined possible, is it possible that our most jarring realization is that we have been asked to wake up? For generations, cultural facades have answered for us the questions that we naturally ask as we mature and encounter life: Why am I here? What is my purpose? What is my place?

¹⁸⁷ *Joe Versus the Volcano*, directed by John Patrick Shanley, featuring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan (Warner Bros., 1990), accessed January 1, 2018, <http://www.amazon.com>.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Who are my people? What do I have to offer the world? Am I worthy? When we bolt our front doors closed each evening, settling into concentric circles of erroneous understanding, assuming the answers that we have been taught are the only recourse – or choosing to battle those answers with our reputations, our strength, our lives – we can be lulled to sleep by the *no* 's that knock down our dreams and hold us captive to daily necessities.

When the internet began to crash through the walls of our homes in the 1990s, opening our lives in ways that both excited and terrified us, we were asked to awaken to the realities of the world and of the choices we make. But the sleepy lull is instinctive and, in many ways, easier, which means many of us have not yet realized that we are called to wake up to purpose and moment-by-moment intentionality. Instead we cling to our defensiveness and excuses, walking through our days in a state of anxiety as we scroll through social media feeds and wonder why the reality in front of us does not match the filtered photos and pithy memes.

When we seek the disconnect, we find it is easiest to blame: the internet, the younger generation, the older generation, the people around us, our circumstances. Life has been gamified by the technology explosion of the past two decades, and we are increasingly more surprised that the joysticks we hold don't have the same results on the world around us that they do when we manipulate the world in Minecraft, Super Mario Bros., Candy Crush Saga, Facebook, or Snapchat. Our answer is to wake up, and waking up means that we will need to make decisions we may not want to face and stand up in situations that demand our voice. When we sleep, our body relaxes into comfort; when

we awaken, we are opening ourselves to the extremes of discomfort, comfort, and any realm of possibilities in between.

At just before 4 a.m. on New Year's Day morning, 2018, a teenager died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound after inadvertently shooting himself in the head during a game of Russian roulette. According to a local police captain, the teenager had brought the 357 revolver to the home and, while there were other people present at the time, he was the only one playing the game: "At some point, he took it out and began to play – as we know it – Russian roulette. Spinning the cylinder of the gun and placing it to his head. He did this all on his own accord, and there were no other people who were involved with the incident as far as that goes. One of the rounds did fire, which killed him," the captain reported.¹⁸⁹

As startling as the tragedy itself were the Facebook posts that followed: "Where were the parents in this?" some community members accused. "Way to start the New Year with a bang!" one man wrote, and his comment was tagged with smiling, laughing, and thumbs-up emojis multiple times. Not only had life become a game for this teenager, whose brain was hardly developed enough to conceptualize the enormity of the game he had chosen to play, but life is a game for the observers as well. Most would never have the gumption to approach the grieving family of this poor young man, let alone accuse, ridicule, or degrade them. Where is the courage in a culture that is waking up to a surprising reality of the enormity of life? Where is the intentionality, morality, compassion, and grace? If our remarkable ability to see, hear, and engage with one another is informing our culture in groundbreaking ways, how can the church enter in

¹⁸⁹ Bob Heye, "Police: Teen Dies After Playing Russian Roulette in Sherwood Home," *KATU*, accessed January 1, 2018, <http://katu.com/news/local/police-teen-dies-after-playing-russian-roulette-in-sherwood-home>.

rather than step away? Our western American culture has been curiously obsessed with *self* since the social revolution of the 1960s, and the introduction of the internet in the 1980s and 1990s has intensified that fascination. As we consider the trends and ramifications of self-help, self-awareness, self-image, and self-actualization, it is important to recognize that fear and shame often lurk in the shadows of a search for self, threatening to overwhelm and encouraging the seeker to simply go back to sleep. How can we call for courage, as Joe Banks suggests, and enter in with the humility, passion, and purpose of missionaries?

Self-Help

If we critically consider how *self* has become a lynchpin of 21st-century American culture, we must begin with the generations-old genre of self-help books. I remember visiting bookstores as a child and eyeing the shelves titled “self-help” with a mixture of curiosity and trepidation – much like an inadvertent encounter with *People Magazine* or *Cosmopolitan* in the dentist’s office. The section was clearly marked, and the books that lined those shelves addressed issues of personal insecurity, financial struggle, parenting quandaries, leadership issues, and so on. Classics such as Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Harold Kushner’s *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, and John Gray’s *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* helped to edge the self-help genre into an increasingly more widespread market, and today publishers identify categories such as “willpower,” “vulnerability,” “psychology,” or “business” rather than “self-help.” As Boris Kachka writes in “The Power of Positive Publishing:

How Self-Help Ate America,” self-help snake oil is no longer contained on those singular eclectic shelves where it once stayed:

Today, every section of the store (or web page) overflows with instructions, anecdotes, and homilies. History books teach us how to lead, neuroscience how to use our amygdalas, and memoirs how to eat, pray, and love. The former CEO of CNN writes the biography of an ornery tech visionary and it becomes a best seller on the strength of its leadership lessons. The Nobel-laureate psychologist Daniel Kahneman writes a subtle analysis of our decision-making process and soon finds his best seller digested and summarized in MBA seminars across the country. Philosophical essayist Alain de Botton launches a series of self-help books called “The School of Life,” whose titles will begin with “how to.” Even before books are written, their advances are often predicated on strong “takeaways” targeted to proven demographics. More like a virus than MacDonald’s frogs, self-help has infiltrated and commandeered other fields in its drive to reproduce.¹⁹⁰

From a biblical standpoint, the self-help genre is dangerously unmoored. Much like New Age mysticism or eclecticism, self-help aids and abets as the feel-right winds will blow, laying out steps for accomplishment that are not too painful and not too compliant. In other words, if it feels right, it is right, and if it feels wrong, it either means that more self-correction is necessary, or it is wrong. The slippery rationale is enough to make most educated people shudder, and yet the self-help trend pulls in billions of dollars as an industry each year. The market demand is explosive, and it feeds on people’s weaknesses. Agree or disagree, the cultural grounding is clear.

What concerns me the most about the self-help industry is that it tends to engender self-congratulatory back-pats rather than forward movement, an founded sense of accomplishment rather than actual production. Much like someone who feels as if they have accomplished a task merely by announcing the need to do it, not by actually doing it, these books fill readers’ minds with a sense that they have accomplished something

¹⁹⁰ Boris Kachka, “The Power of Positive Publishing: How Self-Help Ate American,” *New York Magazine*, January 2013, accessed January 2, 2018, <http://nymag.com/health/self-help/2013/self-help-book-publishing/>.

new and unique when in actuality they have done little more than indulge themselves in some light and mostly forgettable reading. But the desire for light and forgettable is unmistakable. Rhonda Byrne has grossed hundreds of millions with her best-selling *The Secret* book series; the crux of her philosophy is that positive thinking will help us to achieve our goals. Deepak Chopra also makes millions each year with his books, teas, herbal supplements, lotions, shampoos, and other products; his theories emphasize the importance of listening to our hearts and taking responsibility for our actions. Stephen R. Covey sold millions after first publishing *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and his books outlines a series of progressive habits that are built on what he calls “The Character Ethic,” which attempts to ground our decision-making in a universal ethical standard; many have suggested that *The 7 Habits* is a secular interpretation of Mormon principles. Interestingly, Covey studied American self-help books in his doctoral work at Brigham Young University, although I suspect his studies helped him to enter more fully into the industry rather than rise above.

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Sean Covey, one of Stephen Covey’s eight children, argues from a progression that moves from “The Set-Up” to “The Private Victory” to “The Public Victory” to “Renewal,” and the seven habits he outlines are as follows: (1) be proactive; (2) begin with the end in mind; (3) put first things first; (4) think win-win; (5) seek first to understand, then to be understood; (6) synergize; and (7) sharpen the saw.¹⁹¹ Throughout the book, Covey offers anecdotes, illustrations, checklists, and encouragement, and the reader may feel affirmed and encouraged in the process of reading. But the book – like most self-help books – does not encourage the reader to dig deeply into the who, what, where, and why of *self*. The book does not ask

¹⁹¹ Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

the reader to look closely in the mirror, and not just any mirror but a high-powered magnifying mirror, to see and begin to acknowledge what is reflected in the glass. The book does not challenge the reader to understand the reflected image first without hesitation, shame, anger, or hurt, and then learn to articulate what is there so that others might learn from his or her experiences. In other words, the book does not ask the reader to dig deeply, which typically suggests that the meaning, in time, will be lost. While the self-help industry may be explosive and culturally all-consuming, it has not challenged us to step much beyond a simple acknowledgement of the word *self*.

Self-Awareness

The first step is an awareness of self. If I exist as an individual who is unique from the other brains around me, from the landscape the surrounds me, and from the context where I find myself, how do I understand that differentiation? Do I measure myself by defining and judging what lies around me, and assuming that I am the norm around which all else revolves, rather than beginning by defining myself? There is a narcissism that underlies a lack of self-awareness, as those individuals would rather see the rest of the world take the time to understand and describe them rather than vice versa. Self-awareness also can be muddled by past hurts and abuse, loss, insecurity, anger, or sorrow. Many people become increasingly more self aware in their late teens and early 20s as they begin to interact with the world as adults, making decisions and setting personal boundaries. When these changes come with foresight and intentionality, self-awareness can be healthy; when these changes come by happenstance or situation, an individual may not develop a sense of self-awareness at all. According to Dr. Adrian

Furnham, self-awareness is “the accurate appraisal and understanding of your abilities and preferences and their implications for your behavior and their impact on others.”¹⁹² While some may begin with the “accurate appraisal and understanding of your abilities and preferences” and feel rather self-satisfied about their level of self-awareness, the greater challenge comes at the end of the definition: “and their implications for your behavior and their impact on others.” Furnham tucks two key points in here: both the implications for our own behavior, and the implications for the kind of impact we will have on those around us. Without a deep-set understanding of self at this level, most behavior becomes reactionary and sleepy rather than intentional and wide awake. Self-aware individuals are “more resilient, more realistic, and for others more predictable,” Furnham continues.¹⁹³

In an article for the *Harvard Business Review*, Anthony K. Tjan writes that strong leadership is impossible without an astute sense of self: “You can’t be a good leader without self-awareness. It lies at the root of strong character, giving us the ability to lead with a sense of purpose, authenticity, openness, and trust.”¹⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the sheer expanse of the internet and the speed with which we must react in order to appear efficient have eroded self-awareness in our 21st-century American culture. When we cannot take the time to reflect on our own needs and or ponder purpose or make creative mistakes, we lose the sense of ourselves amidst the monolith. How do I remember to distinguish myself when I am always plugged into the larger mass, always responding

¹⁹² Adrian Furnham, “Self Awareness: How Self Aware Are You? Do You Know How You Come Across?” *Psychology Today*, November 27, 2015, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sideways-view/201511/self-awareness>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Anthony K. Tjan, “5 Ways to Become More Self-Aware,” *Harvard Business Review*, February 15, 2015, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2015/02/5-ways-to-become-more-self-aware>.

and always present? Where do I make space for solitude, for rabbit trails of thought, for healthy failures?

When I asked my adult students recently to carve 15 minutes for boredom, some were excited and embraced the activity, and others were dangerously flummoxed. Regardless, their responses were thoughtful and interestingly indicative of a culture struggling to incorporate technology in a comfortable, productive way:

- Student 1: For my 15 minutes of solitude, I took a bath. After about 5 minutes, I reached for the book I brought with me and read the book jacket. After I read the book jacket, I checked the clock and realized I still had several minutes to go. I wanted to spend this time truly distraction-free, so I put the book down. At first, I spent my time thinking about how I was going to fill my time. I checked the time a lot, and I started to panic when I saw that I had 7 whole minutes left. So I downed my Moscato and poured myself another glass. I started reading the back of the shampoo bottle, and then the conditioner. I thought about what my dog might be doing, and then I heard her snoring. By the time the 15 minutes were up, I was completely over the bath. Usually when I take a bath, I either read or watch TV. Baths are pretty relaxing for me, and I go to the tub to unwind. This experience was anything but relaxing.
- Student 2: I often spend time in prayer, meditation, and yoga several times a week. During those times, I put away electronics and practice clearing my mind. For purposes of this exercise, I wanted to challenge myself a big more. I left home

without my phone and walked to a nearby park. Once there, I found a bench close to the river and sat quietly. Not having my phone was daring for me and produced an initial sense of nervousness. It took me a little longer to let go of restless thoughts, but once there, I felt a sense of openness that allowed me to receive. For that moment in time, I could let go of expectations and enjoy the beauty of nature. It was different than some sort of prayer or meditation time because I gave myself permission to let go and feel the moment without expectations. My electronics were not an option, and I wasn't anticipating future needs but was present in the moment. It felt fabulous.

- Student 3: I personally think of myself as someone who will wait in the ridiculous drive-up line for a single cup of coffee. But this day, I went inside Starbucks to order. After I had ordered my coffee, I waited eagerly for my coffee like everyone else, but this time was different. As I waited, I purposely left my phone in my car so I wouldn't be tempted to scroll through my feed, and the most miraculous thing happened. This middle-aged woman (also not looking through her phone like everyone else we were standing with) asked me how my morning was and what I had planned for the day. I responded with a quick overview of my work day and then politely asked her for her agenda for the day. We were in the same line of work, but she was working with a temp agency. Before either of us received our morning coffee, a gentleman approached her asking if she was looking for a full-time position with her line of work. Seriously so astonishingly mind blowing. If I had chosen to be on my phone during this time period, she would not have expressed her temp work

- with anyone surrounding us, this gentleman would not have overheard our in-person conversation, and she would not have been offered a full-time position.
- Student 4: I spent 30 minutes taking my dog for a walk though my neighborhood. I put my phone away, but my brain seemed to be stuck in overdrive. My thoughts were scattered and racing. I wondered if this was a side effect of my constant technology usage throughout the day. I couldn't stop thinking about school assignments that were due, issues that I'm facing at work, what I want to accomplish in the future, recent news stories, and a plethora of other things. I couldn't help but think it was no wonder that people use social media as a distraction. I felt anxious at times like I needed to hurry up and get back so that I could get things done. However, by the end of the walk, my mind started to clear up a little – not completely, but noticeably. I plan on continuing to examine this as I go for walks. By actively noticing the way my thoughts were scattered and chaotic, I was able to wrangle them in a bit. I may be able to use this as a tool to relieve anxiety and meaningfully disconnect for a bit each day.
 - Student 5: What I found when trying to make myself sit still and listen for 15 minutes is that it's incredibly hard. Unless I'm thinking about going to bed and giving myself a focused you're-going-to-sleep-now pep talk, it's hard not to reach for my phone, my computer, my iPad, my video games, or any number of the other items that are sitting around me. I think I am going to work on incorporating this more into my morning routine because almost one of the first things I do when I wake up is to start checking

email (which usually is just deleting junk emails first thing in the morning). Maybe I can give myself a few minutes to sit, think, plan, and contemplate before I jump in to what the rest of the world wants to place on my plate.

In an era when the world appears to be demanding more and more of each of us each day, it is difficult to remember who we are. While the 21st century is marked by a decided search for self, self-awareness is disappearing into a demanding swirl of Snapchat streaks, Instagram likes, and Facebook emojis. How can we ensure self-awareness among the leaders and 21st-century missionaries in our churches before we turn our attention to those around us?

Self-Image

While self-awareness can provide a first glimpse beneath the surface of differentiation from the world that surrounds us, self-image moves a step closer to careful introspection. Thirty years ago, self-image was an autological phrase: We carried an *image* of how we perceived our *self* in the world. In the 21st century, on the other hand, self-image is frequently defined in one of two ways: (1) by the self in a false, idealistic manner or (2) by the friends, family, and strangers that surround the self. In other words, even if an individual has an astute sense of self-awareness, his or her self-image could be tattered by the internet waltz that can carry us from alarming news story to self-affirmation to odd pet photos within seconds. According to a survey reported in CNN by Common Sense Media, many teens who are active on social media worry daily about how their image is received:

- 35 percent are worried about people tagging them in unattractive photos.

- 27 percent feel stressed about how they look in posted photos.
- 22 percent felt badly about themselves if their photos were ignored.¹⁹⁵

A 2013 Microsoft Research study suggests that seasonal patterns of depression in high-income nations such as the United States correlate directly with a crowd-sourcing social media index that tracks social activity, emotion, and language on Twitter. More than 27 million Americans suffer from depression, and more than 30,000 suicides in the United States each year are directly associated with a depression disability; in the 21st century, the World Health Organization began ranking major depression as “one of the most burdensome diseases in the world.”¹⁹⁶ Because of the study, its authors and others are working to develop individualized predictive models that are able to analyze a person’s social media feeds in order to provide early warnings of potential issues of depression or other disorders.¹⁹⁷

Paradoxically, the images and videos that go viral are often those that expose something more richly human than perfection – a celebrity’s error or an ordinary person’s struggle. Consider the self-deprecating Twitter video posted by University of Texas student Ann Mark in December 2017. In the video, Mark is walking across UT’s vast campus, describing her experience with her first final exam as a college freshman:

Mark tells viewers that she showed up to her exam room without a “blue book,” a thin journal of notebook paper used primarily for essays. After acquiring two blue books, she admits she hasn’t been to class in nearly a month and realized she was

¹⁹⁵ Caroline Knorr, “How Girls Use Social Media to Build Up, Break Down Self-Image,” *CNN*, January 12, 2017, accessed January 2, 2018, www.cnn.com/2017/01/12/health/girls-social-media-self-image-partner/index.html.

¹⁹⁶ Munmun De Choudhury, Scott Counts, and Eric Horvitz, “Social Media as a Measurement Tool of Depression in Populations” (Redmond, WA: Microsoft Research, 2013), accessed January 2, 2018, www.munmund.net/pubs/websci_13.pdf.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

in the wrong text room. After thinking she found the correct room, she's told her exam is in another building that shares the same name as one of the auditoriums on campus. She managed to make it to her exam for World Cinema History and wrote an essay about the film *Napoleon Dynamite*.¹⁹⁸

Within just two days, the video went viral on Twitter, with more than 100,000 reTweets and 300,000 likes. UT-Austin President Gregory L. Fenves even responded to Mark with a Tweet, offering to buy her four years worth of blue books. Other community members posted words of gratitude for Mark's transparency and encouragement for her journey.¹⁹⁹ Several days later, the video went viral on Instagram as well. For Mark, the video was a means of venting her frustration in a way that affirmed her experience, excused her errors, and helped her to move forward. Depending on her own level of self-awareness, Mark may have considered the experience an affirmation of her poor preparation as a student or an opportunity to move forward into a higher level of excellence.

From a biblical standpoint, God assures us again and again throughout Scripture that we are esteemed and worthy:

- Joshua 1:9: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."
- Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

¹⁹⁸ Maribel Molina, "If You've Ever Taken a College Final, You Can Relate to This UT Student's Struggle," *Statesman*, December 18, 2017, accessed January 2, 2018, www.statesman.com/news/state--regional-education/you-ever-taken-college-final-you-can-relate-this-student-struggle/od3SKz529srgIsXoLbgyDM/.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

- Jeremiah 29:11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”
- Matthew 10:31: “So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”
- Luke 12:7: “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”
- Ephesians 1:4: “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”
- Hebrews 10:35: “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”
- 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”
- 1 John 4:4: “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

If we are missionaries to our family, friends, neighbors, and strangers, how can we carry this level of Scriptural peace and confidence into an internet world that both affirms and destroys, encourages and dissuades?

The 21st-century has introduced a new level of fleeting but permanent nuance that makes it exceedingly difficult to discern our own worth beneath the online identity we are

obliged to create and the assumptions about us that others encourage. Is the answer to insist that people unplug and re-center themselves, or is the answer to step more fully into the internet milieu in order to bring levity or clarity? Likely both.

Self-Actualization

The fourth and final *self* in our consideration of the uniquely 21st-century search for self is self-actualization, which is the admirable goal of bringing a healthy self-awareness and a healthy self-image to bear in the world. Self-actualization is the fulfillment of an individual's potential, or – in biblical terms – the ability to step fully and mindfully into God's plan. Many of us would prefer to bypass the difficult work of self-awareness and self-image and move directly into self-actualization, jumping into the spotlight without the hard work behind the scenes or accept the promotion without working our way diligently up through the ranks. But shortcuts rarely lead to success. The most admirable individuals and leaders are those who have fought to earn their place, lifting others along the way and earning the trust, respect, and appreciation of their peers. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs points the individual from (1) basic needs such as food, water, and shelter, to (2) psychological needs such as belonging and a sense of accomplishment, to (3) self-actualization, which he defines as achieving one's full potential. According to Stephen Joseph's 2016 article in *Psychology Today*, Maslow identified the first two levels as deficit-filling, which means each defines a state in which an individual is lacking or seeking something.²⁰⁰ The final level, self-actualization, is not about a lack but about a natural pre-wiring that allows us to rest comfortably in this

²⁰⁰ Stephen Joseph, "What is Self-Actualization?" *Psychology Today*, September 13, 2016, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-doesn't-kill-us/201609/what-is-self-actualization>.

default state. According to Maslow, the self-actualization level allows us to be the following:

- efficient in how we perceive reality
- accepting of ourselves and of other people
- able to form deep relationships
- appreciative of life
- guided by our own inner goals and values
- able to express emotions freely and clearly²⁰¹

What if we moved ahead in our 21st-century internet-infused culture with the Maslowian assumption that we are each hard-wired for self-actualization? What if the default belief in our churches, schools, workplaces, and communities was that each of us is not only fully capable of self-actualization but that is our presumed end result? What if we acknowledge those who are still struggling with self-awareness and self-image, and we offer them tools and guidance to move beyond their own sticking points?

Consider the complexity of the Logan Paul “Suicide Forest” scandal, which pushed social media to a heightened level at the close of 2017: Paul, an American YouTube vlogger and actor, filmed a third part to his “Tokyo Adventures” in Aokigahara, a forest on the slopes of Japan’s Mt. Fuji known as “suicide forest” for the hundreds of people who have tried to take their own lives there. While hiking into the forest with his entourage, Paul encountered the body of a suicide victim hanging from a tree. He continued filming, wearing a green googly-eyed hat and later posting close-ups of the victim’s body with the face blurred out. “This is not clickbait,” Paul said in an

²⁰¹ Ibid.

introduction to his video. “This is the most real vlog I’ve every posted to this channel.”²⁰² Paul’s disrespect for the victim, the victim’s family, and the gravity of the situation smack of a gamified life and a deep lack of self-awareness. “Yo, are you alive?” Paul calls out to the victim, then draws closer. “His hands are purple. He did this this morning,” he says to his viewers.²⁰³ Members of Paul’s crew joined him in their astounding inability to grasp the gravity of the situation; one friend posted his own video titled “WE FOUND A DEAD BODY!!!” In only 24 hours after it was loaded, Paul’s “suicide forest” video had already hit 6.5 million views on YouTube before Paul himself voluntarily removed the video. Reaction of Twitter was quick and pointed, denouncing Paul for his insensitivity and calling for a boycott.²⁰⁴ Louis Matsakis from *Wired* and other writers have asked YouTube to bear some responsibility for encouraging young vloggers to overstep social boundaries: “YouTube takes 45 percent of the advertising money generated via Paul and every other creator’s videos,” Matsakis writes. “According to SocialBlade, an analytics company that tracks the estimated revenue of YouTube channels, Paul could make as much as 14 million dollars per year. While YouTube might not explicitly encourage Paul to pull ever-more insane stunts, it stands to benefit financially when he and creators like him gain millions of views off of outlandish episodes.”²⁰⁵

Paul’s individual understanding of self-awareness, self-image, and self-actualization is youthful and egregiously limited, suggesting someone who likely

²⁰² Louis Matsakis, “The Logan Paul Video Should Be a Reckoning for YouTube,” *Wired*, January 3, 2018, accessed January 3, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/logan-paul-video-youtube-reckoning/>.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

bypassed much of the first two levels on his way to the third. As Maslow himself suggests, the first two levels represent a search for something that is missing, and those who neglect to fulfill what is missing will continue to experience the lack even as they move on to other things. While Paul's apology video is heartfelt and sincere, the vlogger's ability to conceptualize his own error is limited to an understanding of the immediate situation rather than the broader scope of a cultural swing or a deeper moral dilemma. And Paul is far from alone. As we seek to engage with the world with a 21st-century sensibility that acknowledges the complexity of a new digitized, gamified landscape, how will we train pastors, leaders, and educators to encounter our western American culture with the empathy, compassion, wisdom, and purpose of a new kind of missional church?

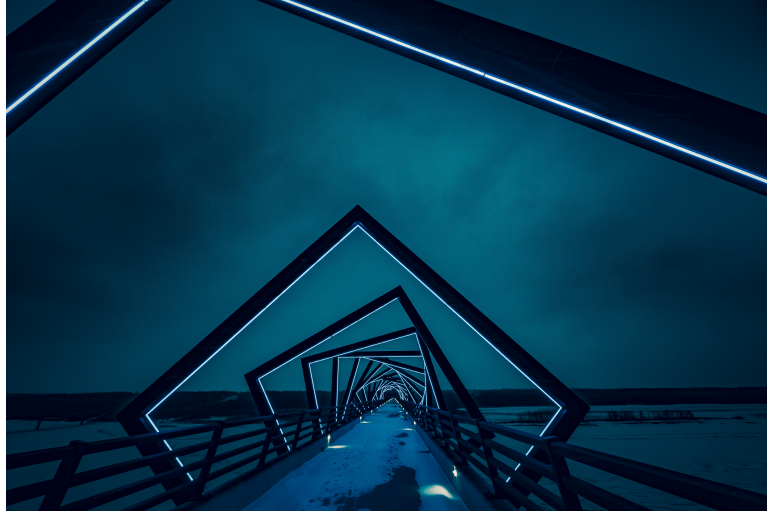


Photo by [Tony Webster](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Chapter 4: The Intelligence Quotient (IQ)



Photo by [Isai Ramos](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Chapter 5: The Emotional Quotient (EQ)



Photo by [Davide Ragusa](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Chapter 6: The Audience Quotient (AQ)



Photo by [Alex Wong](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Chapter 7: The Future Church



Photo by [Hans-Peter Gauster](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Chapter 8: AQ Assessment Tools



Photo by [Greg Rakozy](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Conclusion

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