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# Reframing the Gospel For Millennials: A Study in Shame, Identity, and Belonging

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

REFRAMING THE GOSPEL FOR MILLENNIALS:  
A STUDY IN SHAME, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DOUGLAS HECK

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2019

Portland Seminary  
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Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 11, 2019  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies

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## ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 introduces the problematic issue around communication between the three major divergent worldviews, known as: 1) *innocence/guilt*, 2) *honor/shame*, and 3) *power/fear*. Chapter 2 is focused on the biblical roots describing the three negative emotions of guilt, shame, and fear. These problematic emotions birthed three worldviews, which are identified as three culture-types. Comparing the differences in these three culture-types helps to explain the millennials' mindset shift. They are moving away from their original *guilt/innocence* mindset toward a *shame/honor* mindset. This shift has resulted in a communication gap that causes them to abandon their childhood churches.

People acquire their primary needs differently depending on their cultural mindset: guilt/innocence, shame/honor, and fear/power. These differences in mindsets cause drastically different responses to life experiences. Understanding these three culture-types and the different ways people acquire their needs is a solid beginning toward understanding the separation between baby boomer churches and the emerging adult population of millennials.

This foundational understanding is followed by acknowledging three developed theories of Christ's atonement, which provide solutions for each of the three mindsets: substitutionary theory, satisfaction theory, and ransom theory. Chapters 3, 4, and 5, respectively, return to the primary thesis of millennials' issues of 1) needing to deal with their shame issues, 2) needing to answer their identity question of "Who am I?" and finally 3) needing to fulfill their drive for belonging by answering the question, "Where do I belong?" Chapter 6, the dissertation conclusion, focuses on solutions for the Church and preachers regarding reframing philosophies of ministries and preaching methods.

These are designed to give insight and understanding helpful for institutional Baby-Boomer-led churches to bridge this gap to millennials.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

*How can we best present a gospel framed for millennials experiencing shame, poor self-image and an unfulfilled need for belonging?*

### **The Millennial Generation Is Leaving the Church**

Andy remained in Seattle after graduation, burdened with \$65,000 in college debt. Unable to secure his dream job, he settled into a temporary job as a coffee-shop barista. Life was not as he expected, or even as he was seemingly promised. Ashamed that his expensive university degree did not result in hoped-for employment, Andy found himself spending most evenings alone, wondering “Who am I?”

His self-image faded to a blur of colorless grays as self-doubt and shame intensified into a deep loneliness. Social events that once provided life-giving relationships had become superficial, especially as Andy hid his shame and his doubts about the future. Intimacy previously abundant and cherished among community of friends faded. This fading relational authenticity also included his long-held trust in Christianity and his childhood church.

Questions about God, sex, and science grew in his mind, but he was afraid his doubts might cause him to be rejected by his pastor, so he stopped attending church altogether. His questions began to haunt him, and shame set in. Andy felt alone. His once-eventful life settled into ordinary days. The once-loud honor he had enjoyed from affirming teachers, mentors, parents, and friends faded into silence and a sense of purposelessness, which incubated even darker questions.

Andy is a composite example of the many young adults found in Seattle where I have pastored, taught, and ministered for the past 30 years. From field and academic research, I have discovered that the millennial generation, born between 1984 and 1998, faces:

- 1) **Shame:** shame-prone emotions;
- 2) **Identity:** unclear self-identity and lacking self-esteem;
- 3) **Belonging:** an unfulfilled quest for belonging to an authentic community.

These three core findings, which are elaborated in this dissertation, are the root cause for a communication breakdown between millennials and the organized church, which has resulted in a separation: millennials are leaving church. The solution is to present to them a reframed gospel, focused to answer their heartfelt needs of *honor*, *identity*, and *belonging*.

### **Dissertation Summary**

Chapter 1 introduces the problematic issue around communication between the three major divergent worldviews, known as: 1) *innocence/guilt*, 2) *honor/shame*, and 3) *power/fear*. Chapter 2 is focused on the biblical roots describing the three negative emotions of guilt, shame, and fear. These problematic emotions birthed three worldviews, which are identified as three culture-types. Comparing the differences in these three culture-types helps to explain the millennials' mindset shift. They are moving away from their original *guilt/innocence* mindset toward a *shame/honor* mindset. This shift has resulted in a communication gap that causes them to abandon their childhood churches.

People acquire their primary needs differently depending on their cultural mindset: guilt/innocence, shame/honor, and fear/power. These differences in mindsets

cause drastically different responses to life experiences. Understanding these three culture-types and the different ways people acquire their needs is a solid beginning toward understanding the separation between baby boomer churches and the emerging adult population of millennials.

This foundational understanding is followed by acknowledging three developed theories of Christ's atonement, which provide solutions for each of the three mindsets: substitutionary theory, satisfaction theory, and ransom theory. Chapters 3, 4, and 5, respectively, return to the primary thesis of millennials' issues of 1) needing to deal with their shame issues, 2) needing to answer their identity question of "Who am I?" and finally 3) needing to fulfill their drive for belonging by answering the question, "Where do I belong?" Chapter 6, the dissertation conclusion, focuses on solutions for the Church and preachers regarding reframing philosophies of ministries and preaching methods. These are designed to give insight and understanding helpful for institutional baby-boomer-led churches to bridge this gap to millennials.

### **Understanding Core Human Needs**

Millennials are leaving church. They are embarking on a quest for new ways to deal with shame and poor self-identity, and they are searching for an authentic and accepting group to belong to. There is statistical evidence for this exodus. A five-year survey by Barna Group contains articulate statements made by millennials.<sup>1</sup> These are responses are organized into six basic reasons for their departure from church. But before

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<sup>1</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

the statistics and the survey are visited, one must first understand what motivates someone to embark on a new path. What is it that causes people to make major changes? What motivates them to give up the potential security of a group to launch a quest of self-discovery? The answers find their genesis in the three human responses to sin: guilt, shame, and fear.

The primary unmet need that millennials are experiencing is rooted in the *shame/honor* culture. This is in contrast to the *guilt/innocence* culture most of them were raised in. This change is the stress point for the growing gap in worldviews between millennials and baby boomers. The dominant cultural persuasion of millennials is causing their primary need to be different than their predecessors, which induces a seismic cultural shift. In this trio of base drives—guilt, shame, and fear—the note which one sings is based upon that individual's response to guilt, shame, or fear. This song reflects their motivation for finding a chorus with which they may harmonize. For this reason, it becomes necessary to consider these primary cultures.

There are socio-economic dynamics which answer the reason why the guilt, shame, and fear cultures even exist. These dynamics reveal how humans acquire basic needs for their life, such as food, shelter, security, honor, identity, and belonging. The pathways to these needs are accessed differently by each of the culture types. These cultures differently reward or punish their members based on their values. These cultures reward by using *innocence*, *honor*, or *power*, and punish by using their corresponding opposite trait of *guilt*, *shame*, or *fear*.

These cultures act as gatekeepers controlling resources necessary for life. These three gatekeepers are specifically named 1) formal institutions, 2) human communities, and 3) unseen spirits, as seen illustrated in Figure 1.

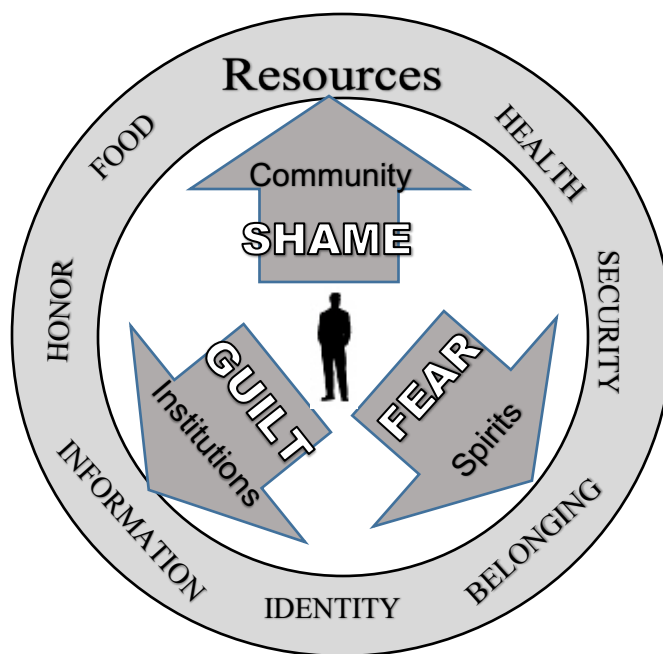


Figure 1. Culture Gateways<sup>1</sup>

Each person attempts access to their life-need through one of these gatekeepers, including the millennial generation at focus here. In spite of any attempts at independence, or even hiding, everyone needs other people. To this point, Jayson Georges, a missiologist and missiologist specializing in honor/shame cultures, and creator of Figure 1 says: “Unless a person can survive entirely alone, he or she must ensure a good relationship with at least one of the gatekeepers.”<sup>2</sup>

Each system has a unique protocol that a person must follow to access resources and to remain *righteous*, or in *right-relationship*, in that system. Notice in the illustration

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<sup>2</sup> Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (San Bernardino, CA: Time Press, 2016), 27.

the pathway the individual travels is determined by their personal mindset, which derived from one of the three base emotional responses to transgression.

The path of a person attempting to acquire essential resources (outer ring in Figure 1) must travel through their respective potential social barriers of 1) institutions, 2) community, or 3) spirit (see arrowheads in Figure 1). Specifically, these are *institutions*, which corresponds to the guilt-emotion, *community*, which corresponds to the shame-emotion, and *spirits*, which corresponds to the fear-emotion.

For a first example, someone seeking resources through the cultural gateway of *institutions* must be determined to be *innocent* by that institution for passage. This is accomplished by obeying their rules and laws. If they are found guilty by the violation of the rules and laws, then they are blocked access. In the second case of *community*, the individual would have to be *honorable* in the esteem of the community by respecting the community's expectations and playing the appropriate roles to access resources and be freed from their shame. If they fail to do so, then they are *shamed*, possibly even to banishment from the community. For the third pathway, with the instance of attempting to access resources through the gateway of *spirits*, one must be *powerful*, specifically in the spiritual realm by observing the proper rituals, incantations, or techniques, lest they be powerlessly vulnerable and left captive to *fear*. So, the negatives and positives correlate to one another: guilt/innocence, shame/honor, and fear/power. The positives, then, are the reward for proper protocol, controlled by the gatekeeper. It is the drive to acquire these needs which provides the motivation for change. However, each culture takes different pathways toward the same needs.



This is key for understanding a core reason millennials are leaving church. They are shifting from the guilt/innocence mindset of their fathers and mothers, a Western mindset, toward a shame/honor mindset. This is vital observation to be held while attempting to reframe Jesus' gospel, since the gospel presentation can be best received when it is culturally specific and appropriate. In the millennials' shift away from *guilt/innocence*, which has as its gateway *institutions*, they have subsequently abandoned institutions. In moving to embrace the mindset of shame/honor, their gateway to gain resources shifted from *institutions* to honor-based *communities*. To them, institutions seem out of touch and irrelevant to acquiring their needs.

Since for these millennials *communities* and not *institutions* are now their gateway for acquiring their basic needs, their identity and belonging will be accessed and found through relevant community. These twin needs of belonging and identity become the very thing which separates them from the current institutional church. At first glance, their quest appears strange to "Western" institutional mindsets, who continue to access their needs through the gateway of *innocence/guilt*. Thus, they pause and wonder why millennials depart from their church systems. They are unaware of the cultural dynamic shift. Gaining awareness of the problem is an important start before any solutions can emerge. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the human shame dynamic becomes vitally useful.

### **Defining Shame**

Shame is the underlying negative emotion that devalues both identity and a sense of belonging. Since *shame/innocence* is the avenue which millennials are increasingly choosing to journey upon, then comparing that emotion to the *guilt* emotion, which was

predominate in their forefathers, is a useful exercise. Shame researcher Brené Brown says, “The majority of shame researchers and clinicians agree that the simple difference between shame and guilt is best understood as the differences between ‘I am bad’ and ‘I did something bad.’”<sup>3</sup> Guilt is correctable usually by a simple action, such as forgiveness or repayment. However, the dynamic of shame goes much deeper and is not as easily correctable since it touches the core issue of self-identity and subsequent issue of self-esteem.

<p><b>Guilt</b> = I did something bad.  <b>Shame</b> = I am bad.</p>
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*Figure 2. Comparing Guilt and Shame*

Christian missiologists long ago identified three distinct sin responses in human cultures: guilt, shame, and fear. In the mid-twentieth century, Eugene Nida, one of the founders of the modern discipline of language translation studies, identified these three as transgression-responses. He states: “We have to reckon with three different types of reactions to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: *fear*, *shame*, and *guilt*. It seems that for the most part people are afraid of being punished or of being caught in the act by some person or deity. Often there is a sense of shame, expressed as ‘I’d feel terrible if anyone saw me doing this.’”<sup>4</sup> After Nida introduced this concept of the three transgression-responses, other scholars and academics have developed his embryonic concept further.

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<sup>3</sup> Brené Brown, *Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing, 2010), 41.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Mission* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1954), 150.

Among them is pastor and author John Forrester, who compares fear, shame, and guilt to one another in order to build understanding for each, saying: “Anxiety [fear] results when existence is challenged; shame results when worth is challenged; guilt results when behavior is challenged.”<sup>5</sup> Shame, according to Forrester, has to do with the devaluation of personhood, which then negatively impairs self-esteem. An individual’s identity becomes negatively altered. Compared to guilt, which is generally seen as correctable behavior and does not challenge personal identity, shame results in deeper pain and damage to a person. Since millennials are experiencing more shame than guilt, this brings understanding to a source of their pain and subsequent exodus from church.

Extensive research by psychologists regarding shame has revealed its negative effect on one’s ability to respond to people around them. For example, June Tangney, shame-guilt researcher and psychology professor at George Mason University, summarizes her research, saying, “that in the face of transgression or error, the self turns toward the self—evaluating and rendering judgment. Thus, the experience of shame or guilt can guide our behavior and influence who we are in our own eyes. On the other hand, shame and guilt are inextricably linked to the self in relationship with others.”<sup>6</sup> This enforces the understanding that self-esteem deeply affects relationships with other people, especially the community to which one desires to belong. The person of low self-esteem does not feel worthy to belong in or to be accepted by the very group they long to

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<sup>5</sup> John Forrester, *Grace for Shame: The Forgotten Gospel* (Toronto: Pastor’s Attic Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>6</sup> June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt* (New York: Guilford Press, 2002), 2.

belong to. Thus, acceptance becomes a gateway for belonging and a subsequent increase in self-esteem.

Tangney and her co-author Ronda L. Dearing created a table which compares shame with guilt and serves further to shed light and bring expanded understanding of the shame dynamic millennials increasingly experience.

*Table 1. Research Findings Comparing Guilt and Shame Dynamics.<sup>7</sup>*

<b>Key dimensions on which shame and guilt differ</b>		
	<b>Shame</b>	<b>Guilt</b>
Focus of evaluation	Global self: “ <i>I did that horrible thing</i> ”	Specific behavior: “ <i>I did that horrible thing</i> ”
Degree of distress	Generally more painful than guilt	Generally less painful than shame
Phenomenological experience	Shrinking, feeling small, feeling worthless, powerless	Tension, remorse, regret
Operation of “self”	Self “split” into observing and observed “selves”	Unified self intact
Impact on self	Self-impaired by global devaluation	Self-unimpaired by global devaluation
Concern vis-à-vis the “other”	Concern with other’s evaluation of self	Concern with one’s effect on others
Counterfactual processes	Mentally undoing some aspect of the self	Mentally undoing some aspect of behavior
Motivational features	Desire to hide, escape, or strike back	Desire to confess, apologize, or repair

The primary observation to note is that guilt transgressions are individual and, as such, leave the self unified and unimpaired, whereas shame transgression impairs one’s evaluation of self, causing a desire to hide and feelings of worthlessness or

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<sup>7</sup> Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*, 25.

powerlessness. This reveals the movement of negativity beyond the scope of the individual into a community affair.

### **The Expanding Communication Gap**

In growing numbers, millennials are facing shame and its negative effects on identity and one's sense of belonging. They have come to believe that the organized church has been unable to adequately answer their deep and haunting questions about God, the nature of man, and the emotional and relational ingredients which constitute authentic community.

A five-year study of young adult Christians was undertaken by Barna Group and the results written into a book authored by the group's president, David Kinnaman. The objective was to learn the reasons behind why young people leave the organized church. Kinnaman states: "Many young people who grew up in church and have since dropped out do not hesitate to place blame. They point the finger, fairly or not, at the establishment: *you lost me*."<sup>8</sup> From these young Christians' perspective, the church seemingly marches on, teaching bullet-point propositions, oblivious to the fact that in their loyalty to this principle-driven style of preaching they have lost a large portion of their audience. Barna Group's survey points to a terminal communication gap between millennials and organized churches. There are six general points distilled from the survey which illustrate this communication gap and which are listed and evaluated following the section showing statistical evidence of the millennial exodus.

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<sup>8</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 9.

However, before the Kinnaman study is reviewed, it is important to note that this trend is not just American; some Korean millennial-generation Christians have gone further than just stating “*you lost me*,” to say of the established church, “*You pushed me out*.” This was the predominate statement made to one of my disciples, who is now a pastor/missionary and ministry colleague, during his July 2018 trip to South Korea. He asked Korean millennial Christians, “Why do you no longer attend your childhood church?” Their answers were dominated by the sense of feeling *pushed out*. Again, this was confirmed by another Korean pastor colleague, who oversees young adult ministries at a church in the Seattle area. He found that the institution of the established Korean church is not simply unwelcoming to millennials, but, in effect, is actively dis-fellowshipping, banishing, and “pushing out” their succeeding generation.

Whether young Christians are feeling *left behind*, as the Barna survey will show, or *pushed out*, as the millennial Koreans seem to express, the result is essentially the same: there is an expanding gap between Christian young adults and the established church, resulting in a wide-scale exodus by millennials from their childhood churches.

### **Statistical Evidence of the Exodus**

Startling statistics from Pew Research Center give a clear sign that large ranks of Christians are shifting their religious classification away from their Christian tradition and toward predominately an *unaffiliated* classification, as seen in Figure 3.

## Ranks of unaffiliated are expected to grow due to religious switching

*Religious switching, 2015-2020*

	Switching in	Switching out	Net change
Unaffiliated	12,220,000	4,640,000	+7,570,000
Muslims	1,300,000	880,000	+420,000
Folk religions	760,000	410,000	+350,000
Other religions	370,000	130,000	+240,000
Hindus	30,000	30,000	<10,000
Jews	40,000	80,000	-40,000
Buddhists	470,000	830,000	-370,000
Christians	4,960,000	13,140,000	-8,180,000

Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections. See Methodology for details.  
"The Changing Global Religious Landscape"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

*Figure 3. Ranks of Unaffiliated Reveals Religious Switching<sup>9</sup>*

This projection by Pew Research reveals that of the major religions, Christianity ranks significantly as having the greatest net loss of adherents. Yes, 4,960,000 joined Christianity, but another 13,140,000 have disclaimed the title, leaving a net loss of 8,180,000. This raises the obvious question, "What might be the causes for this sharp decline?" A first hint toward an answer is revealed when you notice that the largest growth category of people (7,570,000 people) self-classify as "unaffiliated," showing a large shift directly from "Christian" and toward the term "unaffiliated." This moniker of unaffiliated leaves room for these millennials to not totally abandon their faith, but sends a clear message for the established church leaders that there is a communication gap, which subsequently manifests into a relational gap.

<sup>9</sup> "The Changing Global Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, April 5, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>

These statistics birth questions requiring further research. What can be determined from the signals sent by the above statistics? Are there discoverable reasons the predominate portion of these people surveyed have chosen to reclassify themselves as “unaffiliated?” Is it a particular age demographic represented in that group? Are there cultural aspects at play, such as *guilt/innocence* verses *shame/honor*? These important questions are explored further in this study.

It appears that the millennials are a substantial portion of those who leave church. Robert P. Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, chronicles the demise of the American Evangelical church, saying a “major force of change in the religious landscape [is] young adults’ rejection of organized religion. Young adults are three times as likely as seniors to claim no religious affiliation.”<sup>10</sup> This denial of affiliation is a growing trend among millennials.

Regarding this exodus, Carolyn Custis-James comments in The Huffington Post that “These aren’t just un-churched youth, which would be bad enough. Young people—even those raised by Christian parents, who’ve grown up in the church, walked the aisle, given their lives to Jesus, gone on mission trips, and graduated from Christian colleges—are leaving the American church in droves.”<sup>11</sup> Her quote is significant since it reveals that although exposed to the gospel while they were young, this simplified gospel did not make sense to them as their life issues became more complex. There appears to be a serious communication gap in the method and depth of the gospel that is proclaimed to them.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 48.

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Curtis-James, “The Millennial Exodus,” Huffington Post, September 26, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-millennial-exodus\\_us\\_59ca5cd8e4b08d66155045d0](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-millennial-exodus_us_59ca5cd8e4b08d66155045d0)



## Research Revealing Six Core Reasons for This Exodus

What are the reasons for this disconnect between the young people of America, including the millennials and even the following generation, Generation Z, and the current American church? Establishing causation, though not a perfect science, can be possible by reading the signs. These signs bring some root issues into focus.

For an example, Carolyn Curtis-James quotes a 2006 survey, again from Barna Group, of 16- to 29-year-olds, which found that the “three attributes young Americans associated with ‘present day Christianity’ were being antigay (91 percent), judgmental (87 percent), and hypocritical (85 percent).”<sup>12</sup> This early research aligns with surprising similarity to the discernment seen more recently in a Barna Group study, released in 2011, which clearly lists six primary reasons young Christians leave church. According to this more recent study, “no single reason dominated the break-up between church and young adults. Instead, a variety of reasons emerged. Overall the research uncovered six significant themes why nearly three out of every five young Christians (59%) disconnect either permanently or for an extended period of time from church life after age 15.”<sup>13</sup> The reasons for the millennials’ migration are becoming increasingly clear, and they provide data for anyone who desires to understand the signs of the times.

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<sup>12</sup> Curtis-James, “The Millennial Exodus.”

<sup>13</sup> “Six Reasons Why Young People Leave Church,” Barna Group, September 27, 2011, <https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/>. See the complete findings of this 5-year research project in Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*. Kinnaman is the president of the Barna Group.

*Table 2. Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church*

**Six Reasons Young Christians Give for Leaving Church:**

1. Churches are overprotective
2. Christianity is shallow
3. Churches seem anti science
4. Questions of sexuality
5. Church appears exclusive
6. The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.

Evaluating these six themes sheds brilliant rays of light upon the question of why young Christians are leaving church. These six reasons, summarized from the answers collected from young Americans by the 2011 Barna survey, and from the report and evaluations by Kinnaman in his book *You Lost Me*,<sup>14</sup> are expanded on below.

*Churches Are Overprotective*

To the young Christian, churches seem fear-based and risk-adverse, which is contrary to these same young people's unprecedented technological access to ideas and worldviews. *Christianity Today for Pastors* writer Eric Reed, in compiling and writing about the Barna Group research, notes, "One-fourth of 18- to 29-year-olds say church demonizes everything outside church, including the music, movies, culture, and technology that define their generation."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 91-185 lists and evaluates the six discovered reasons why young Christians are leaving the established church.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Reed, "Six Reasons Young People Leave the Church," *Christianity Today Pastors*, Winter 2012, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2012/winter/youngleavechurch.html>. This article substantially quotes the Barna Group survey whose results are conveyed in *You Lost Me*.

To the young person raised in a high-tech culture, with its unprecedented access to information, they feel the church is out of touch with the world, saying that the “church is ignoring the problems of the real world.”<sup>16</sup> To them, the church feels overprotective of established ways, unwilling to advance and change with the culture around them.

Regarding this disconnect, one young person named Nathan said in the Barna survey, “A lot of [our upbringing] was very fear-based to get you to do something as opposed to giving you logical reasons why you should or should not do something.”<sup>17</sup> Nathan chose the compound word *fear-based*, which reveals his perception of the church as being not appropriate to his culture, which is not fear-based, but most likely was centered in shame-based or guilt-based thinking, a subject that settles at the core of this dissertation. Younger adults sometimes refer to their parents as having been “helicopter parents,” those who hover over their children to keep them safe from every conceivable danger, including ideas. Inadvertently, they are also protected from failure and negative consequences of every kind, which could have served to train for the realities of the adult world. This becomes a source for shame and shutdown, as seen in Andy in the opening story.

Here is another criticism that young Christians and former Christians level at the church: “Christians demonize everything outside of the church.”<sup>18</sup> There is an apparent Gnosticism that has entered into the church, whereby spiritual and natural are separated

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<sup>16</sup> Reed, “Six Reasons Why Young People Leave Church.”

<sup>17</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 95.

<sup>18</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 97.

instead of integrated, a core tenant of Jesus' teaching.<sup>19</sup> To the young, watching a movie that is not Christian can reveal the truth about our human condition and need for redemption in ways that are as powerful and provocative as any sermon. Young adults who were once a part of the church are not afraid of pop culture—especially the stories told in its music and films—but seeing that older Christians are afraid is a cause for disconnect between the generations. The young desire to explore “the world,” and have come to believe that the world is not nearly as hopeless or awful as the church of their childhood led them to believe. The eschatology of escapism-from-an-evil-place has left many young people re-thinking their parents' Christianity and wondering why a loving God is offering such a future for them.

### *Christianity Is Shallow*

One-third of these young people are calling church boring, and twenty-three percent said that “the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough.”<sup>20</sup> Sadly, one in five (20%) of these young adults who attended a church as a teenager said that “God seems missing from my experience of church.”<sup>21</sup>

Is it possible that the young have noticed that the churches they attended had put on elaborate events, but the message of the gospel of Jesus as applied to daily life outside of these events was absent? It could be that in the desire for attracting numbers as a sign

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<sup>19</sup> John 1:51. Jesus refers to himself as *the ladder* connecting heaven and earth.

<sup>20</sup> Reed, “Six Reasons Why Young People Leave Church.”

<sup>21</sup> Reed, “Six Reasons Why Young People Leave Church.”

of ministry success, contemporary church truly did become shallow, as they accuse, void of God's presence and Spirit.

To those surveyed, church became broad and shallow, rather than narrow and deep. Being lost in a crowd was less preferred than having a few close and deep friendships. The attractional model of church,<sup>22</sup> with professional bands and speakers, indeed drew large crowds in the "church growth" movement of the 1990s, but the fruit of this movement a generation later is sadly evident in the voice of the young who call their childhood church experience *shallow*. "The research shows that most young people lack a deep understanding of their faith," says Kinnaman.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps a description of this superficiality is found in Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton's book *Soul Searching*, where they label today's young Americans as subscribing to *moralistic therapeutic deism*: "God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."<sup>24</sup>

This startling description reveals a widening separation from the gospel of Jesus, evident in his plea to his father for his disciples, praying "that they [subsequent disciples]

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<sup>22</sup> For characteristics of "attractional" Christianity, see Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 18-19, 225 and Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 66, where Sweet states that the attractional model is built around the word "come," as opposed to the "missional model," which is centered around the word "sent."

<sup>23</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165.

may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us.”<sup>25</sup>

Jesus reveals in this prayer that he was close to, experiencing a oneness with, his father. This is a sharp contrast to deistic thinking, which has God as an absentee or distant father. This deep intimacy with other people, which is a deep need for millennials, appears missing to them, having been swallowed by the shallow masses. This is yet another place where there is perception that authentic community, needed to establish worth and honor, is lacking.

### *Church Seems Anti-Science*

The Barna Group found that many science-minded young people are struggling to find ways of staying faithful to their Christian beliefs and to their professional calling in science-related industries.<sup>26</sup> They are having difficulty connecting the claims of Christianity, which they learned as a child, to the scientific evidence being shown to them, and perceiving this incongruity feel forced to reject Christianity. They believe that they must choose between church and science.

Many among them feel afraid to ask certain questions of their pastors and risk being seen as doubters. If they do ask science-related questions of their pastors, they discover them either unwilling to admit ignorance or ill-equipped to openly dialogue about any seeming conflicts between science and the Bible’s creation account. The survey reveals that twenty-three percent go so far as to say that they have “been turned

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<sup>25</sup> John 17:21.

<sup>26</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 137.

off by the creation-versus-evolution debate.”<sup>27</sup> Apparently, those focusing on the common creation-verses-evolution debate, in their talking-down posture, fail to connect with young people, who clearly prefer open-minded dialogue leading toward discovery and learning. The most common of perceptions in this arena (35%) is “Christians are too confident they know all the answers.”<sup>28</sup> Managing tensions between science and faith must be part of the church’s future journey in order that they might retain their science-minded young who are adept at rapidly procuring facts and information.

With half of churchgoing 13- to 17-year-olds saying that they hope to train for science-related careers, the church’s response could be to revisit and expand their doctrines and understanding regarding the cosmos, creation, and eschatology. Of these teens, 23% hope to enter medical and health-related industries, 11% engineering, 8% research science, 5% technology, and 5% veterinary studies.<sup>29</sup> Yet issues of science are a surprisingly rare topic in churches, with only 1% of youth pastors saying they have addressed a subject related to science in the past year. One can read the signs and observe that if half of your young people are interested in science, it would be helpful to frame teachings that include how science and scripture can blend and not be at odds with each other. It can be as simple as opening a dialogue which touches upon the questions and interests of these young Christians.

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<sup>27</sup> Reed, “Six Reasons Why Young People Leave Church.”

<sup>28</sup> Reed, “Six Reasons Why Young People Leave Church.”

<sup>29</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 139.

### *Questions of Sexuality*

Sexuality is one of the greatest expressions of God's creativity and his intention for humans. It is also confusing to teenagers, where young Christians' church experiences related to questions of sexuality are often simplistic, unhelpful, and shame-causing. To them, church feels repressive and behind the times, especially on current issues of gender choice, fear of dialogue regarding sexual preferences, and silence on shame-issues such as masturbation. Pornography is not new for this generation, the ease of unfettered access to digital pornography is indeed new. A significant tension in young Christians is how to live up to the church's expectations of chastity and sexual purity in this culture of hypersexuality. One-sixth of young Christians (17%) said that they "have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them."<sup>30</sup> This is causing deep shame, especially a sense of unworthiness.

Sexual confusion is a major issue for millennials and a significant root cause for shame. This shame then hinders the growth of the proper self-esteem necessary for confidence and wholeness. To deal with this shame, these young adults are choosing to abandon the source of judgement causing their shame, which they believe to be the church and its "out of date" teachings. This issue of sexuality is particularly pronounced among 18- to 29-year-old Catholics, of whom forty percent said the church's "teachings on sexuality and birth control are out of date."<sup>31</sup> It becomes the church's responsibility then to create a sex-positive environment, where openness, satisfying answers from the

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<sup>30</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 153.

<sup>31</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 153.



Bible, and emotional psychology can blend into open and shameless dialogue resulting in healing and wholeness.

### *Church Appears Exclusive*

Young Americans have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness and acceptance, two characteristics perceptively absent to them in their church experience. Today's young adults are the most eclectic generation in American history in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and technological tools.<sup>32</sup> This flows over into eclectic sources of authority; they are no longer loyal to a primary or single authority.

The survey shows that twenty-nine percent said, "churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths," and an identical portion felt they are "forced to choose between my faith and my friends."<sup>33</sup> The rise on prominence of non-Christian religions in America means that young Christians are establishing close friendships with those of vastly diverse faiths. To them, the church feels like a members-only country club designed for the insiders. The doors to the church appear closed to young adults, at least socially, and, therefore, also emotionally. There results mistrust and separation due to an absence of communicating with a sense of understanding and acceptance. The church is speaking a culturally foreign language.

An interesting hallmark of the millennial generation in America is their emphasis on fairness over rightness. They tend to determine the rightness and wrongness of their

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<sup>32</sup> Reed, "Six Reasons Why Young People Leave Church."

<sup>33</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 175.

choices by what seems fair, reasonable, and accessible.<sup>34</sup> Hating to be out of the loop, they actively create diverse social connections. These social connections, however, are often manufactured “brands” or versions of themselves according to who they wish they were rather than their authentic selves. They are masks, and upholding that image becomes exhausting, setting them on course once again for authentic, face-to-face community.

The established church tends to make *believing* a prerequisite for belonging, perhaps by having candidates respond to preaching by publicly raising their hand, or walking forward at an “altar call.” These actions were once the desired signs indicating that one had now crossed over into Christianity and become an accepted member of a faith community. Kinnaman reports from the Barna Group’s research that “young people start with the basic assumption that everyone belongs and have a hard time understanding spiritual communities that feel like insider-only clubs.”<sup>35</sup> Among the young, there is automatic acceptance and affirmation, which is contrasted by their church experiences, where “believing” a foggy set of propositions was the prerequisite for membership. This lack of acceptance and “sense of fairness” results in a serious disconnect, which is yet another cause for the exodus of many from their childhood churches.

### *The Church Feels Unfriendly to Those Who Doubt*

Related, in part, to the reasons above, but clearly a standalone issue, is that the church does not appear to be a place that allows young adults to express doubts. Any

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<sup>34</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 173.

<sup>35</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 174.

crisis of faith is treated as disloyalty, as if they were crossing over a line into the feared blackness of the “enemy camp.” If not feared as disloyalty, the questions may be discounted as trivial and dismissed. Either way, many do not feel safe admitting when Christian doctrines sometimes do not make sense to them. In the Barna survey, twenty-three percent admitted having “significant intellectual doubts about my faith.”<sup>36</sup>

It is true that doubt can be a powerful motivator toward the positive outcome of a deeper spiritual life, but more is required than motivation. It takes a personal touch, like a spiritual “father,” to guide them. It is as though the shame which accompanies doubt imprisons an individual in a cave, surrounded with a hopeless sense of darkness. To reverse this requires a personal light-bearer to enter this cave and guide them out into the light. Simply, escape from the dark cave of shame requires help from another.

This personal touch is the aspect of genuine ministry that appears to be absent in the current generation of propositionally driven churches. Division between people and between churches is rampant, and one cause is because of warring propositions. The focus moved from people loving one another to doctrinal accuracy. Leonard Sweet says:

The hatred that strikes us in the front and back is born on the battlefields of warring propositions. The Left believes in universal principles. The Right believes in universal principles. Each side operates from idolized propositions about life. Each side displays a preference for argument over encounter and embrace. Each side lives a faith more stated than demonstrated. Each side is struggling to represent or at best personify certain ideals rather than embody a spirit and incarnate a presence.<sup>37</sup>

The propositional-focused churches, in their efficient and event-focused mindsets, are lacking in the personal, one-on-one touch modeled by Jesus. Even Paul states to the

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<sup>36</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 174.

<sup>37</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 102.

Corinthian church to which he had been a father, that “we have many teachers, but not many fathers.”<sup>38</sup> Paul’s claim as *father* is a metaphor meant to ignite images of closeness, acceptance and guidance—a relationship much deeper than being a teacher. Paul designed his corrections and good news carefully, as a father would certainly undertake for a child that he loves. He later states that if one could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and even have the gift of prophecy, but does not have love, that knowledge and understanding is empty and in the end amounts to nothing.<sup>39</sup>

In a startling and related theme, one in six young adults with a Christian background said their faith “does not help with depression or other emotional problems” that they experience.<sup>40</sup> So many emotional problems stem from the root of shame and the accompanying sense of isolation. This separation often breeds a deep loneliness due to absence of authentic community. This is yet another reason that the complete gospel includes a father figure to walk you out of isolation into emotional wholeness.

These six root issues, especially when combined, give understanding as to why young Christians are separating from church. There is a growing gap in communication between them and the structured church. What, then, can be a solution? The beginning is to reframe of the gospel of Jesus into an environment of love and acceptance. Keeping in mind the preceding research, this reframing starts by gaining an understanding of holistic biblical interpretation, primarily designed for the preacher or the one desiring to reach across the communication gap and grasp the hand of one on the other side.

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:15.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

<sup>40</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 190.

## Reframing the Gospel for an Appropriate Presentation

### *Describing Holistic Scripture Interpretation*

This dissertation argues from the premise that the communication gap between millennials and the church is a result of a deficient understanding of Jesus' message and his holistic method of delivery. It is holistic because biblical interpretation is not simply a matter of choosing a linguistic, historical, contextual, or even cultural interpretation, but instead it is a creative whole of these.<sup>41</sup>

To describe what is meant by *holistic interpretation* of scripture, Kenneth Cragg, a distinguished Anglican Islamic scholar, developed the following parable while discussing the nature of the Gospels in a sermon preached at All Saints Episcopal Cathedral, Cairo, Egypt on January 16, 1977:

Much in current Western scientific mentality has been tempted to deny the status of *fact* (and so of truth) to everything not demonstrable in test-tubes or provable by *verification*. This instinctive reductionism of many contemporary philosophers sadly prevents them from reckoning with the historical meaning of faith and the deep inter-relation of both event and mystery.

Let us take help from a parable. November 22 (Texas), 1963. Suppose I say: "A man with a rifle from a warehouse window shot and killed another man in a passing car." Every word here is true (assuming we accept the Warren Commission). But how bleak and meager the facts are—so sparse as to be almost no facts at all. But suppose I go further and say: "The President of the United States was assassinated." This is more deeply factual because it is more fully related. The victim is identified, the killing is told as political, and the perspective is truer. But we are still a long way from the meaning of the tragedy. Let us attempt a further statement: "men everywhere felt that they had looked into the abyss of evil and people wept in the street."

The third statement tugs at the heart. It is true with a different sort of truth. It pre-supposes what the others state, but goes beyond into dimensions that begin to satisfy the nature of the fearful things that happened. Without something like that

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<sup>41</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 20.

third story, the event would remain concealed in a part-told obscurity so remote as to be, in measure, false.

Now let us set the Gospels, and the whole New Testament, in the light of this parable. Clearly they are the third kind of statement, deeply involving the heart and mind in a confession of experienced meaning—meaning tied intimately to history and to event. That is the way it is with Jesus—not neutrality, bare record, empty chronology, but living participation and heart involvement. For Jesus' story, like all significant history, cannot be told without belonging with the telling in mind and soul.

Christian faith is fact, but not bare fact; it is poetry, but not imagination. Like the arch which grows stronger precisely by dint of the weight you place upon it, so the story of the Gospels bear, with reassuring strength, the devotion of the centuries to Jesus as the Christ. What is music, asked Walt Whitman, but what awakens within you when you listen to the instrument? And Jesus is the music of the reality of God, and faith is what awakens when we harken.<sup>42</sup>

Bishop Cragg's parable and explanation colorfully illustrates *holistic interpretation*, beginning with the telling of a thing in mind and soul. They are facts made alive and personal. They become emotional, and therefore cherished.

This sheds a ray of light upon why the current generation of church leaders may have lost the younger generation. In their quest for efficiency, a quest which grew large churches, they have abandoned the personal, emotional, and holistic essence of the gospel inherent in Scripture. Words need to create more than simply images; they must touch base emotions such as fear, guilt, and shame.

The existing generation of church leaders and preachers have predominantly trained as wordsmiths, and were formally trained to exegete isolated verses of Scripture. Dr. Leonard Sweet, mentor, author, and professor, relays a never-to-be-forgotten metaphor, which is contained in a story. In his story-metaphor, he explains this difference between word exegesis and image exegesis, a method which he passionately hopes to

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<sup>42</sup> Kenneth Cragg, "Who Is Jesus Christ?" An unpublished sermon preached by Bishop Cragg at All Saints Episcopal Cathedral, Cairo, Egypt, on Sunday, January 16, 1977. Sourced from Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 20.

instill in the next generation of preachers. As plenary speaker at the Issachar Initiative Conference, a national forum gathering invited scholars and ministry overseers, he relayed the following story.<sup>43</sup>

Two of his children both arrived home after school announcing that they were studying birds. The first studied birds by placing a bird in a pan and dissecting it to learn of its inner workings. It was a bird-in-a-pan study done laboratory style. The second child also studied birds, but instead of staying in the laboratory, traveled out into the bird's natural habitat, learning where birds lived, how they interacted with each other, and what they ate. This was studying a bird in the bush. Here are two different ways to study birds: a bird in the pan or a bird in the bush. One analytical, and the other experiential. Their results will obviously be quite different from one another. The first is the composition of the bird, and the latter the context the bird lives in. This awakens an understanding of the huge difference in ways to study scripture.

To relate to millennials, it is vital to do holistic study, with the bird-in-the-bush style of exegesis, which is to study context. To study only composition and not holistic context lacks color and emotion. It is dead and not alive. Leonard Sweet contends that this is the language of the millennial generation—living images with emotion, sound, and story.

The millennial generation, in general, does not aspire to be wordsmiths, as were their parents, but instead image-smiths. Having grown up with an unprecedented availability of images and soundtracks, they crave communication that is not the lengthy

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<sup>43</sup> Leonard Sweet, "Reading the Signs," (sermon, The Issachar Initiative Conference, Orlando, FL, August 15, 2016).

“words only” of former generations. Written word is currently giving way to visual images accompanied with a soundtrack. So I echo the big question asked and answered in Kinnaman’s study: “How can we follow Jesus—and help young people faithfully follow Jesus—in a dramatically changing culture?”<sup>44</sup>

Professor Sweet’s offer, as the solution to this question, is to study and preach the gospel using *narraphor*.<sup>45</sup> This is a compound word he constructed by coupling the word *narrative* with *metaphor*. It is good and descriptive, and is a highly significant truth which has the potential to touch this generation that grew up on image-rich narratives imbedded with creative metaphors. These stories have cast their new worldview.

#### *Using a Holistic Gospel as the Bridge*

I am in agreement with Dr. Sweet, that Jesus’ method of presenting his *holistic* gospel was *narraphor*, and serves as a timeless model that, when embraced, can enable this generation to hear, understand, and follow his teachings. There is yet time and opportunity for the established church to learn this approach of reframing their gospel message in attempt to bridge the generational chasm. I purpose an approach to learning using applied semiotics, images, and metaphors, modeled by Jesus, and assuming his way of teaching is replicable and knowable to the young adult generation. This is also the center of discussion among many shame/honor missiologists like Jackson Wu, who

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<sup>44</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Leonard Sweet, “Narraphor: A Story with a Metaphor” (Lecture, The Issachar Initiative Conference, Orlando, FL, August 16, 2016).



profess that while the gospel of Jesus is firm in its overall framework, there yet remains a fair degree of flexibility in the way one may present it.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to Wu, New Testament scholar N. T. Wright also calls for flexibility in presenting the gospel, calling it *responsible reconstruction*:

If we don't make the effort to do this reconstruction, we will, without a shadow of a doubt, assume that what Jesus did and said makes the sense it might have made in some other context—perhaps our own. That has happened again and again. I believe that this kind of easy-going anachronism is almost as corrosive to genuine Christian faith as skepticism itself.<sup>47</sup>

Wright says that the contextual misassumptions by preachers are corrosive to genuine Christian faith. Responsible reconstruction is necessary to bring Christ's genuine meanings forward. A holistic, cultural contextualization of image-meanings from the original ancient Eastern framework gives fuller meaning and understanding to the concepts they represent, which then serve as keys to unlock adaptations for current use. The Bible was not written to Western thinkers, but instead to Easterners.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, if a reader is from a strong Western mindset, the Bible was not written to that person. To interpret the Bible and preach sermons through a Western cultural mindset is a mistake. However, once the proper Eastern cultural meanings are responsibly discerned, then these Bible messages can indeed be re-storied for application to Western-culture humanity.

In their book *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brian state: "We can easily forget that Scripture is a foreign land and that

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<sup>46</sup> Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 30.

<sup>47</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 21.

<sup>48</sup> Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World*. (Scottsdale, AZ: Mission One, 2015), 35.

reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience.”<sup>49</sup> To open the Bible is to step into a very different world than that of most of its Western readers. If a person is unfamiliar with the geography, customs, and languages, they would hardly notice which behaviors are rude or polite and would be quite unfamiliar with the writer’s expected emotional responses.

Richards and O’Brien go on to say, “It is a better method to speak of what the [Bible] passage meant to the original hearers, and then to ask how that applies to us.”<sup>50</sup> This, many times, is very different from what they wish or might choose the meaning to be for themselves. This classic oversight is a mistake that has led to many aberrant doctrines. The English Standard Version Study Bible, in its commentary on Scripture interpretation, sums up this concept, saying, “Wise interpreters still locate every verse in its context and ask how the original audience understood it.”<sup>51</sup>

Bruce Malina, in his classic work *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* writes, “The words we use to say and speak do in fact embody meaning, but the meaning does not come from the word. Meaning inevitably derives from the general social system of the speaker of the language.”<sup>52</sup>

Although the core meaning of scripture passages are to be understood in context of the original hearers, Jesus’ essence and teachings do not change according to culture. He has always been the same. Scripture states: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today

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<sup>49</sup> E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinder to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>50</sup> Richards and O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 2564.

<sup>52</sup> Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 1993), 2.

and forever.”<sup>53</sup> Likewise, as Jesus is unchanging, so the gospel message taught by Jesus is timeless, but the delivery methods and metaphors are seasonal. These methods must change with the cultural seasons, and as Sweet says, necessarily the best method is the modern vernacular.<sup>54</sup> What changes is not the message content, but the metaphors with which this unchanging content is communicated. Therefore, we don’t need a better gospel; we need better metaphors.

Getting the gospel meanings correct first from the social history of the biblical world of Jesus lays a foundation for understanding the essence of His message. This then can be faithfully delivered to millennials using a story, with a fresh metaphor. This can serve to communicate the authentic and inclusive love of Jesus to a generation which does not see these qualities evident in the churches they are leaving. This delivery can serve to halt their exodus and begin to meet their need for identity, honor, and belonging. This can bridge the communication gap and allow the gospel to do its intended work in human hearts.

### **Navigating Three Primary Mindsets**

#### *The Three Mindsets Described*

As discussed, humanity’s worldviews can be separated into three basic mindsets. Each of these corresponds to a different human response to sin: 1) guilt, 2) shame, and 3) fear. It is advantageous to be reminded of the foundational quote by Eugene Nida, who

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<sup>53</sup> Hebrews 13:8.

<sup>54</sup> Leonard Sweet, “Narraphor for the Next Generation,” Point Loma Nazarene University, February 10, 2017, video of lecture, 28:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4hkKleFOPE>.

said, “We have to reckon with three different types of reactions to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: fear, shame, and guilt.”<sup>55</sup> Understanding these three emotions is indispensable for understanding the millennials’ worldview. But what becomes helpful is coupling the positive to Nida’s negative-only descriptions, and they become 1) *Guilt/Innocence*; 2) *Shame/Honor*; and 3) *Fear/Power*. Coupling the positive to the negative introduces the solution to each sin reaction. It is the motivation to achieve such positive outcomes that sets one on a quest to acquire the resources they need.

The first cultural mindset of *Guilt/Innocence* is identified as a people group who are predominately individualistic, which is most common in Western societies like those in Europe and the United States. This is where individuals who transgress or “break” laws are *guilty* and seek forgiveness to rectify the wrong. The second culture, *Shame/Honor*, is identified by predominately collectivist groups, common in Eastern societies like those in Asia, where an individual is *shamed* for not fulfilling group expectations and seeks to restore their honor before their community. The final cultural designation of *Fear/Power* is identified as animistic, and typically tribal, where people are *afraid* of evil and harm and pursue spiritual powers from a spirit world through magical rituals, techniques, and incantations.

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<sup>55</sup> Nida, *Customs and Cultures*, 150.

Table 3. Three Mindsets Identified

Three Mindsets		
Guilt/Innocence	Shame/Honor	Fear/Power
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• predominately individualistic,</li> <li>• common in Western societies like those in Europe / United States,</li> <li>• where individuals who break laws (or sin) are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify the wrong.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• predominately collectivist groups,</li> <li>• common in Eastern societies like those in Asia,</li> <li>• where an individual is shamed for not fulfilling group expectations and seeks to restore their honor before their family or community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• typically tribal, animistic</li> <li>• common in Africa and rural Southeast Asia</li> <li>• where people are afraid of evil and harm and pursue power of the spirit world through magical rituals.</li> </ul>

These three cultures, according to Jayson Georges, are like group personalities. He states that “just as individual people have a *person*-ality, cultural groups share a *group*-ality.”<sup>56</sup> *Groupality* refers to an organized pattern of behavioral characteristics of a group. Blending *group* and *personality* works well to describe this phenomenon since it distinguishes it from the word *syntality*, which is more specific to a group’s synergy, or energetic actions, rather than their personality.

Cultures are dear to heart of God. For the church to fulfill her mandate from God of “making disciples from all nations,”<sup>57</sup> it is helpful to grasp the original meaning for the word *nations*. This word in English is translation from the Greek *ethnos*, which has its root the meaning for the English derivative *ethnics*. This meaning more accurately expresses the church’s mission, which is *multi-ethnic*, and, even more broadly, *multi-cultural*. This is especially the case in larger urban settings such as Seattle. Using the

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<sup>56</sup> Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame and Fear Cultures* (San Bernardino, CA: Time Press Publisher, 2016), 11.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew 18:19.

term *nations* can mislead one to imagine obsolete forms of missional techniques, such as traveling great distances to do missions, rather than simply walking across the street. Doing missions *multi-culturally* can happen without the expense of travel. It is not simply international, but is more accurately inter-cultural. Furthermore, it can be expanded to encompass any generationally driven cultural distinctive as well. So then *multi-cultural* becomes *multi-worldview*.

### *Blended Mindsets are Emerging*

These three distinctions have some overlap, and are not cemented strictly inside of the suggested geography of Eastern vs. Western. For example, shame can easily be evident in America's Western culture; however, there differences in how honor is acquired. For the Westerner, the solution for shame often remains individualistic verses the collective solution common in Eastern cultures. Specifically, a Westerner involved in shame would seek his individualistic self-respect restored, where an Easterner involved in shame would most likely seek honor restored in a specific community. In essence, this is simply the difference between the restoration of *self-respect* and *community-respect*.

A key factor causing the current blending of the three cultures is the increasing international migrations of people. This manifests in inter-racial marriages, a global economy, and global information systems. No longer can cultures be defined by using a single word or phrase, but they have become more complex, resulting in harmonies of



*Figure 4. Harmony Mandorla*

mindsets, especially in multi-ethnic urban areas. This dynamic is recognized by missiologist Jayson Georges, who says, “Although guilt, shame and fear are the three distinct cultural outlooks, no culture can be completely characterized by only one. These dynamics begin to interplay and overlap in societies.”<sup>58</sup>

This dynamic has impact for the preacher seeking to reframe the gospel in a culturally specific manner. Although, in America, the tradition has been preaching to a guilt/innocence mindset, but since there is a shift toward shame/honor issues becoming predominant, especially among millennials and Generation Z, a second reframed gospel become necessary. This shifts the primary cultural mindset from individualistic to now include a collective mindset, which may require changes in preaching techniques, such as that of holding individualistic “altar-calls” after preaching. To a shame/honor culture, few would feel comfortable being singled out to make such a major decision. They would sense the need to converse with their community and process through their community, rather than a bold, individualistic move.

It is time for reframing the gospel in America with a keen sensitivity to the cultural distinctive of the intended audience. It is time to move away from a guilt/innocence gospel and toward a shame/honor gospel. This reframing of the message requires reforming the messenger to reflect a maturing cultural intelligence (CQ). A blended harmony of mindsets requires greater sensitivity and discernment from the messenger which includes increasing their ability to read and interpret cultural signs.

Each of the three mindsets is like a blueprint, giving clues useful for framing the correspondingly appropriate gospel presentation. According to shame/honor missiologist

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<sup>58</sup> Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 15.

Roland Muller, who focuses his attention toward the needs of communicating the gospel to the Muslim culture, “These [three cultural mindsets] are similar to an artist creating thousands of colors from three basic primary colors. How much of each primary color issued determines what the final color will be when the paint is mixed.”<sup>59</sup> The final color, then, determines which solution should be emphasized when presenting the gospel.

For example, for the *guilt* mindset, the color of *innocence* is used in painting the gospel, which is best expressed in the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary atonement. For *shame*, the color of *honor* restored through Christians being adopted and given inheritance (inclusion) is the most impactful. And for the *fear* mindset, the gospel color added is gaining *power* in the spirit realm through Jesus’ resurrection and the giving of the inner-abiding Holy Spirit. These atonement solutions are discussed at length in the next chapter.

### *How to Assess the Mindsets in Individuals*

To identify one’s mindset, there are two good options, both of them online assessments: one is Brooks Peterson’s Peterson Cultural Style Indicator<sup>60</sup> and the second is created by missiologist Jayson Georges and named The Culture Test.<sup>61</sup> Both are informative; however, The Culture Test is more complete since it goes beyond Peterson’s two-part comparisons of only *guilt* to *shame* mindsets and includes a third cultural trait,

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<sup>59</sup> Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2000), 16.

<sup>60</sup> Brooks Peterson, “Peterson Cultural Style Indicator,” Across Cultures, accessed October 21, 2018, <https://acrosscultures.com/peterson-cultural-style-indicator/>

<sup>61</sup> Jason Georges, “The Culture Test,” HonorShame, accessed October 21, 2018, <http://honorshame.com/theculturetest/>



that of *fear*. This third trait of fear brings a three-dimensional view, which animates this study. This third dimension is pertinent to the further development of this study, especially regarding millennials, since painting a 3D picture with all three traits is better than just the two predominant ones.

Like in the example of an artist blending colors, it is a matter of degrees in the blending of these three mindsets. These three concepts cannot be so simply isolated into a geo-cultural tri-division of Eastern, Western, or tribal settings. They will quite regularly mix or blend, and elements of all three can be found in every culture.

Finding the dominant trait becomes essential for communication, and gives rise to a need for assessment tools. With modern global migration, each part of the world now has some of the traits of the other parts, of which one must be aware in order to frame the appropriate aspect of the gospel. There are a staggering one billion international travel visas issued each year, which means that approximately one out of six people travel internationally every year.<sup>62</sup> While some of these may be repeat travelers, it is a clear indicator that travel is more accessible, and therefore cultural influences on regions are happening at an unprecedented pace. Mindsets are blending and shifting globally.

It becomes important, then, to discover the dominant traits within a culture without diminishing other parts. Timothy Tennet, a theologian and the current president of Asbury Theological Seminary, focuses a chapter of his book specifically upon shame-based culture which he entitled: “Anthropology: Human Identity in the Shame-Based Culture of the Far East.” In this chapter he reveals that “Virtually every culture in the

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<sup>62</sup> David Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 25.

world contains concepts of both guilt and shame, including the pressure to conform to certain group expectations as well as some kind of internalized ideas about what is right or wrong. The difference is not in the absence of either shame or guilt, but rather in how dominant these tendencies are.”<sup>63</sup> Tennet, then, supports the idea of discovering how dominant the various traits are in the people to whom one desires to communicate the gospel. This makes the job of reframing the gospel not as simple as hoped. It now requires expanding cultural intelligence.

Summarizing, then, an effective reframed gospel for millennials will be a blend of mindsets. It will not simply consider the historical context of the local geography but will expand to also consider other cultural influences. This reframed gospel will look different in every context; there won’t be one reframed gospel for all millennials in the world.

The roots for preaching a relevant gospel are buried deep in the soil of understanding the three emotional sin-responses of guilt, shame, and fear. By a comprehensive understanding these human emotional issues, a preacher can then appropriately choose relevant narratives and metaphors. This will enable a conveyance of Jesus’ love across any cultural or communication chasm and enable the preacher to appropriately choose which version of atonement to emphasize in delivering the good news. In turn, the seed of truth which is well planted resulting in a harvest thirty-, sixty-, and even one-hundred-fold.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 80.

<sup>64</sup> Matthew 13:8. Jesus’ parable in which seeds land in varying types of soils.

CHAPTER 2:  
BIBILICAL FOUNDATIONS—  
THE HUMAN NEED FOR HONOR, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING

**Taking a Fresh Look at Scripture**

The problem of millennials leaving church finds solution in understanding honor, identity and belonging, which become forthcoming chapters (3-5). But before this in-depth look it is helpful to understand the Biblical origins of guilt, shame and fear which ultimately find solution in their respective opposites of innocence, honor and power. This look into the foundations requires certain word studies which bring contextual light to the thesis of this paper.

Just as people assume a cultural orientation from their personal context of guilt, shame and fear, preachers tend to make assumptions based upon the context in which they learned the gospel. It is a blind spot to assume that the methods and metaphors one learned are universally applicable. Showing the gospel to a unique culture and attempting to disciple them while using the wrong cultural lenses often results in the listeners missing the gospel's intended meanings. This is true in the case of the millennials, who summarily voiced, "you lost me." Preachers risk losing the listener when they dismiss cultural intelligence.

Shifting culture necessitates an appropriately *reframed* gospel. This word, *reframed*, is carefully chosen to bring to mind the image of taking an old and dusty picture from one part of the house, where it has not been noticed or appreciated, and moving it to another part of the house, putting it under new lighting, and installing a

frame relevant to its new setting. While it remains the original picture, with its new frame, the picture now becomes noticed and appreciated. So it is with a reframing of the gospel; the message remains the same, but the frame, or method of delivery, is fresh and newly relevant.

For a fresh view of Jesus and his work, one needs fresh lighting and framing. Jackson Wu, in his book *One Gospel*, relates a sermon which he heard preached by famed New Testament scholar N.T. Wright at Willowcreek Community Church. In that sermon, Wright related a personal conversation he had with his wife upon her finding out that he was writing the book *Simply Jesus*:

When my wife knew I was writing this book, she said, “But you’ve written two or three books on Jesus already.”

And I said, “Well yes, that was a little while ago.”

She said, “Well, has Jesus changed during that time?”

I thought for a minute then said, “Well no, but I have.”<sup>1</sup>

Wright expresses it well—Jesus does not change but people do. Human understanding of Jesus and his message deepens and matures, and the mysteries of Jesus are revealed in new lighting. These give rise to a fresh perspective of the person of Jesus and his atoning work. Fresh perspectives become important for connecting cross-culturally with the hearts and emotions of millennials.

In the book that N.T. Wright ultimately produced, he says about Jesus that, “He wasn’t an undemanding friend; he was always a disturbing, a challenging presence....but he was also a sigh-of-relief healing presence.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus is a demanding friend who

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 1.

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 2.

challenges our understandings. Human hearts are changed by him. Hearts are healed by him. So, then, preachers are not only reframing their gospel presentations, but simultaneously are being shifted by Jesus as he reframes them and shines new light upon them. So, in the end, it is the preacher who becomes the enlightened frame through which the changing world may truly see Jesus and not simply his message.

### **Hiding**

Understanding that humanity is hiding brings overall context to understanding millennials current shift toward becoming a more predominate shame-culture. Beginning from Adam and Eve at the creation story, the human response to sin is to hide: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”<sup>3</sup> Motivated by their negative emotions of guilt, shame, and fear, they instinctively went into hiding mode. This remains the primary human response to sin, regardless of one’s cultural frame of reference.

God’s response to human hiding is to become the seeker. He initiates conversation, asking, “Where are you?”<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew language for *where are you* is *ayekah*.<sup>5</sup> God’s question is intended as an awareness question, not a quest to identify Adam and Eve’s current geographical location. God is not looking for them because he cannot find them, but instead he is looking for them to come out of hiding and to become

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:8.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:9.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Walik Katz, “Here I Am – Hineni,” Temple Beth El, November 16, 2018, <http://www.tbesspringfield.org/here-i-am-hineni>

self-aware. This is the thinking of Hebrew scholar Rabbi Schneur Zalman,<sup>6</sup> the first scholar of the Chabad Chassidic movement, who was imprisoned in Petersburg for subversive activity against the Czar. Zalman believed that God's question to Adam and Eve was the one to embark humans on their journey of self-discovery and coming out of concealment. This framework is foundational to understanding not only millennials, but humanity as a whole, regardless of age or culture.

The generation who raised the millennials, the baby boomers, made a categorical mistake, according to Sweet in his sermon to the Northwest District Foursquare Conference pastors.<sup>7</sup> He states that Christian leaders in the boomer generation, primarily encouraged by the teaching of Bill Hybels, had inadvertently developed the thought that people were the seekers, and God was mysteriously hidden. As a result, they created seeker-sensitive churches. As it turns out, according to Sweet, it is mankind who has been hiding and God who does the seeking. Sweet says that "This type of category mistake is a catastrophic mistake."<sup>8</sup> One has to agree, by observing the statistics regarding the millennial generation, that the "seeker-sensitive movement" that swept through the church did not result in more believers, but instead had the opposite result. While looking to bring in more people, instead the church lost a huge portion of the succeeding generation. They were not seeking; they were hiding. A categorical mistake.

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<sup>6</sup> Nissan Mindel, *Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi: A Biography* (New York: Kehot Publication, 1969), [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2606104/jewish/Introduction.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2606104/jewish/Introduction.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Leonard Sweet, "Preaching the Story," (lecture, Northwest District Foursquare Conference, Spokane, WA, October 8, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Sweet, "Preaching the Story."

There exists in the Hebrew language a sacred word which is only carefully spoken. The word is *hineni*, which translated means “Here I am.” Again, this is not a location response, as in “I am here,” like responding to a class roll-call, but a heart-awareness response, as in “Here I am.” At its utterance, a person is coming out of hiding and making themselves known. As Hebrew language expert Rabbi Katz explains regarding the meaning of the word, “the person who can say Hineni understands that it means being fully attentive, non-judgmental and emotionally available, revealing one’s whole self in the moment.”<sup>9</sup> This word is used when one is loved and understands the love by responding unashamedly to it. *Hineni* appears 178 times in the Tanach and, according to Rabbi Walik, it is uttered most often in response to God. This is highly significant because it is evidence that God is the seeker of mankind, not the other way around.

The goal of good research, such as this dissertation, is to reveal truth. The Greek word for truth is *alethea*, which when translated from its root means “as not concealing.”<sup>10</sup> The very nature of the concept of *truth* is the uncovering of something which has been concealed. This fits together with seeing God as the seeker, since Jesus says of himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus calling himself *truth* is the same as calling himself the one who brings people and ideas out of hiding. Sweet

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<sup>9</sup> Amy Walik Katz, “Here I Am – Hineni,” 2.

<sup>10</sup> Strong’s Greek Dictionary, ἀλήθεια *alētheia*; and its root ἀληθής *alēthēs*.

<sup>11</sup> John 14:6.

wonders if instead of *original sin*, theologians would have been most accurate had they chosen instead the terminology *original hiding*.<sup>12</sup>

Being known is essential to humans. A sense of being known, even beyond knowing oneself, is what fills that need for belonging. This was put at risk at the fall of mankind in the garden. Relationships began to deteriorate as openly *knowing one another* was severed. The four broken relationships are 1) relationship to God, 2) relationship to oneself, 3) relationship to others, and 4) relationship to creation.<sup>13</sup>

*Table 4. Four Broken Relationships*

- |                             |
|-----------------------------|
| 1. Relationship to God      |
| 2. Relationship to Myself   |
| 3. Relationship to Others   |
| 4. Relationship to Creation |

The first of these broken relationships is seen when Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and as a result feel they must hide from God. Their previously enjoyed communication and garden walks with God suddenly break apart.

The second broken relationship is seen as humans feel the guilt-emotion resulting from their transgression. All internal peace evaporates and is replaced by a drive to cover one's shame. This indicates the breaking of internal oneness and becoming acutely conscious of the dichotomy of good and evil. This awareness, the knowledge of good and

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<sup>12</sup> Sweet, "Preaching the Story."

<sup>13</sup> Leonard Sweet, and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2012), 50-51.



evil, results in a self-consciousness, and then fear. One is no longer only true to themselves, but now there is a second option, resulting in the diminishing of self-trust. This affects healthy self-esteem and, thus, proper self-identity.

The third broken relationship is seen when Adam blames Eve for the transgression, which births the dynamic of blame-shifting. As blame is placed, shame results, and individuals separate and hide. This tendency often manifests in close relationships, such as with a spouse.

The fourth relationship break is between humanity and creation. After this break with creation, humans must now toil by the sweat of their brow in order to have food for survival. Eating became substantially more difficult, and was compounded by the introduction of thistles. What was once as easy as picking fruit from trees is replaced by the toil of plowing, planting, and tending the vegetation. Mankind's work, which was once fulfilling and rewarding, when cursed became a negative and toilsome experience.

Jesus' mission was the restoration of these four broken categories, and for humans to once again know God, themselves, and each other. To identify the completion of Jesus' mission would then be to look for indicators of when human relationships are restored with God, with themselves, with other people, and with creation. This four-part master plan of God's is the gospel essence, which must be relevantly reframed to touch and heal a hidden generation.

### **A Deeper Look into the Origin of Guilt, Shame, and Fear**

Under this overarching concept of hiding, there is guilt, shame, and fear. They are the three motivational emotions driving humans to hide. Notice these emotions evident at the moment that mankind disobeyed God. First, "the eyes of both were opened," which is

when their consciences were awakened and they experienced *guilt*. Secondly, they “knew that they were naked,” which is a new self-consciousness awakening, the sense of *shame*, which they tried diminishing by covering themselves with leaves. Third, the sense of *fear* is seen where Adam responds to God’s beckoning by saying, “I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”<sup>14</sup> In this telling response man reveals a new emotion of fear that leads to separation by hiding.

These three negative responses to sin become the foundation for searching for the positive solution to each: innocence instead of guilt, honor instead of shame, and power instead of fear. As these negatives are overturned, it releases them from hiding. It restores relationships to God, self, others, and creation. It restores healthy self-esteem and births possibility for feeling worthy to belong to an authentic community. Taking a closer look at each of these negative emotions reveals crucial information necessary to see each reserved.

### *Guilt*

Human’s first response to sin was a guilty conscience awakening in them because of this new knowledge—that of good and of evil. Before this awareness, there could be no guilt, or sense of doing wrong, since humanity was unaware of evil’s existence. While Adam and Eve were in their previously perfect state, they had never felt their consciences condemn them. There was oneness and community evident in all their relationships. However, by sinning, they experienced a dramatic change. Immediately they sensed guilt

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<sup>14</sup> Genesis 3:10.

and knew that they were guilty of participating in evil.<sup>15</sup> Their world abruptly narrowed to choices between good and evil, and confusion ensued.

Guilt-based theology has *innocence* as its primary goal and seeks out how sins can be forgiven. Its focus is upon breaking God's laws, and thereby being condemned. God, metaphorically, is *the judge*, and due this formalized role, a personal, familial relationship is absent. This metaphor is common among Western theologians who are quick to highlight human moral failure and that the penalty for this failure is death.<sup>16</sup> It is a punitive justice system of theology. For those with this mindset, their root solution is to preach the good news focused on the story where God sacrifices his beloved son to death as substitution for us. Therefore, theologians commonly refer to this narrative as *penal substitutionary atonement*. This mindset holds a strong judicial-courtroom perspective.

### *Shame*

Secondly, when Adam and Eve sinned, they not only experienced guilt, but also shame. Once their eyes opened to the knowledge of good and evil, "they knew that they were naked so they hid their shame by sewing fig leaves together made themselves loincloths."<sup>17</sup> God approaches them with his normal desire for relational interaction, but they had hidden themselves in shame.

Pastor and author John Forrester, in his helpful book *Grace for Shame: The Forgotten Gospel*, summarizes shame by saying, "Shame, at its heart, is the experience of

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<sup>15</sup> Muller, *Honor and Shame*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 6:23.

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 3:7.

exposure.”<sup>18</sup> This sense of exposure—nakedness—is a deep sense of vulnerability to which one reacts by hiding. There is an instinctive desire to be un-exposed, or covered. What was once a present and precious sense of oneness with God, self, and others is gone.

Shame is community-oriented. It is collective rather than individual like guilt. If no one else is nearby, then nakedness does not create shame. It is only in the presence of others that shame manifests, which then results in a relational break with one’s community. After shame manifests, the next motivation is the need to discover how to regain and restore honor in the eyes of their community. They need to once again feel worthy of belonging and to regain the sense of feeling honored or respected.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, according to L.A. Burton, “The Indo-European root from which the word ‘shame’ is derived is ‘shem’ or ‘sham,’ which means ‘to hide.’”<sup>20</sup> Shame is a by-product of self-awareness. It carries a foreboding sense of inferiority leading to the relational separations. Thus, shame is not primarily about *doing*, as in the case of guilt, but instead is primarily concerned with *being*, attacking a person’s very sense of identity. So while guilt is primarily concerned with the courtroom and innocence, shame’s key metaphor is *community*, and even more specifically, *family*. It has as its primary goal the search for restored honor among community or family. Shame is the negative regard, that sense of being diminished, while honor is the positive regard, and that sense of

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<sup>18</sup> John A. Forrester, *Grace for Shame: The Forgotten Gospel* (Toronto: Pastor’s Attic Press, 2010), 20.

<sup>19</sup> Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Laurel Arthur Burton, “Respect: Response to Shame in Health Care,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 30 (1991): 140.

acceptance and belonging. Both the positive and negative aspects of shame possess highly relational aspects.

A brief comparison of the general difference between guilt and shame can be helpful. Asa Sphar writes, “Guilt is a value judgment on a person’s behavior. Shame...is a value judgment on the person.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Fear*

In addition to guilt and shame, fear was also introduced as a response to sin. This is revealed in the Garden of Eden narrative at the point when God, while searching for man in the garden, calls to him, asking, “Where are you?”<sup>22</sup> Adam identifies his fear, saying, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”<sup>23</sup> Note Adam’s self-awareness when he says, “I was afraid.” This fear also propels Adam into hiding.

Why was Adam afraid? His fear was prompted by the unknown. Adam and Eve clearly understood the consequence for eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was death, but the issue remained that death was a foreign concept to them, and this unknown resulted in a sense of fear. This fear of the unknown was the result stirred up by gaining knowledge of both good and evil. With an understanding of evil comes an understanding of fear.

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<sup>21</sup> Asa Sphar, “A Theology of Shame as Revealed in the Creation Story,” *Theological Educator: A Journal of Theology and Ministry* 55 (1997): 68.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 3:9.

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 3:10.

Fear-based cultures focus on the fear of spirits and the supernatural world.<sup>24</sup>

Geographically, they are predominately found in Africa, the indigenous tribes of Central and South America, and some Pacific Island cultures. Based upon their worldview, the universe is filled with gods, demons, spirits, and even the spirits of their ancestors. Living humans can only live at peace with these unseen entities by appeasing them. They fear supernatural phenomena and mysterious occurrences which they do not understand. So, for them, if their crops fail, certain unhappy gods must be responsible. Their one need, therefore, is power, and as a result they develop elaborate rituals, incantations, dances, charms, and other methods to gain control of the spirits. They live in a paradigm of fear and how to gain power to control their own lives.<sup>25</sup>

Fear-based cultures are often found in *animistic* cultures. The concept of *animism* was developed by the anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in his 1891 book *Primitive Culture*, where he attempts to describe the difference in thinking between Europeans and people living in Central and South America. He coined the word *animism* from the Latin word *anima*, for “soul.” He saw the animistic worldview as interpreting everything from a spiritual rather than materialistic philosophy. Calling it the first religion, Taylor defines animism as “the general doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Muller, *Honor and Shame*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Muller, *Honor and Shame*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: J. Murray, 1871), 260, [https://archive.org/stream/primitiveculture01tylouoft/primitiveculture01tylouoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/primitiveculture01tylouoft/primitiveculture01tylouoft_djvu.txt)

Whereas guilt-based cultures use *courtroom images*, and shame-based cultures use *community-relational* images, fear-based cultures use *combat-military* images. They are trapped in a complex spiritual warfare and must learn to become good soldiers for survival's sake. Feeling anxious and vulnerable, they ask the existential question of "how can I access the power to control life."

Those who operate today in the fear/power paradigm see themselves living in a physical world that co-exists with spiritual, unseen powers. Power becomes an important factor in fear-based cultures, with a goal of being able to control and exert their will over these mysterious spirits and the spiritual laws. In militant fashion, this culture will treat sin as an evil enemy which must be overcome. Dealing with sin then requires warfare against evil and its consequent negative spiritual opposition in the world.

A fear-based culture, however, is not just limited geographically in tribal cultures, since Pentecostals, by this fear-based definition, could in some way be considered animistic. According to Jayson Georges, *fear/power mindset* is surprisingly also foundational for Pentecostal/Charismatic cultures.<sup>27</sup> With these groups, according to Georges, they view humankind as enslaved by an oppressor and therefore in need of deliverance. Rather than the judgment and punishment of guilt/innocence cultures, this fear-based culture views the consequences of sin as bondage, much like a prisoner who is trapped behind enemy lines. In typical military fashion, the solution is to gain sufficient power in order to break bondages and set the captives free. This mentality appears to be the underlying motivator for Pentecostals/Charismatics who celebrate the increasing of spiritual power by virtue of gathering large numbers of prayer "intercessors" who can

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<sup>27</sup> Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 53.

then battle against these evil forces. They believe that by gathering greater and greater numbers of intercessors, the chances of victory increases. They believe that they can achieve a tipping point<sup>28</sup> of momentum necessary to gain power toward the desired outcome of deliverance from spiritual oppression.

### **Comparing the Resulting Theological Mindsets**

Each of the three sin-responses has formed into cultures that each interpret scripture through their own cultural lenses. As a result, three contrasting theological dynamics emerged, which can be most clearly understood by comparing them alongside each other. This becomes important in order understand the thinking of millennials in the United States.

One researcher who has undertaken this comparison project is missiologist Jayson Georges, who built the following chart (Table 5). It is worthy of closer inspection in order to gain clarity on the three theological perspectives. Georges' research served as the foundation for a five-minute assessment tool, The Culture Test,<sup>29</sup> which allows anyone, in about five minutes or so, to discover the mixture of percentages of the three cultures present in their own mindset. Georges contends that each person does not have an isolated worldview, but everyone is a blend of all three. Though simplistic, it is a useful tool, much like a photo snapshot would be, which might capture a basic image but lacks any polished detail found in a "glamour" shot.

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<sup>28</sup> Malcom Gladwell, *Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: 2000), 9.

<sup>29</sup> Georges, "The Culture Test."



Georges charts categorical metaphors, which provides useful handles for comparison purposes. In the first category of *guilt*, there is the judicial metaphor of a *courtroom*, bringing to mind an image of a place where a judge establishes guilt/innocence. It is institutional in nature and based upon laws or principles. This is contrasted with second category of *shame*, which instead of institutional is portrayed as a relational *community*. In this place, morality is determined by the community rather than a set of pre-written laws. What is sought is honor, which is gained through a system that functions like a social credit rating which measures one's reputation. Because shame and honor are inherently relational, such a culture is collectivist, and the culture is expanded through networks of relationships.

Finally, the metaphor for the *fear* category is *military combat*. In this mindset, the objective is to gain *power* over mysterious spirits through prayers, religious rituals, incantations, or sacrifices. One is seeking a transcendent ruler/deliverer who overcome spirits and victoriously sets one free from bondage. Combat and power are necessary to overcome fear.

*Table 5. Comparing the Three Cultures Theologically<sup>30</sup>*

Category	<b>GUILT</b>	<b>SHAME</b>	<b>FEAR</b>
KEY METAPHOR	<b>Courtroom</b> LEGAL	<b>Community</b> RELATIONAL	<b>Combat</b> MILITARY
Existential Question	How can my sins be forgiven to be assured of heaven?	How can I be part of the community to be respected?	How can I access the power to control life?
Historical Theology	Augustinian, Reformed	<i>Undeveloped</i>	Pentecostal, Charismatic
<b>God</b>			
God seen as	Lawgiver / Judge ( <i>sinless, perfect, just</i> )	Father	Deliverer / Sovereign Ruler

<sup>30</sup> Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 53-54.

Category	<b>GUILT</b>	<b>SHAME</b>	<b>FEAR</b>
KEY METAPHOR	<b>Courtroom LEGAL</b>	<b>Community RELATIONAL</b>	<b>Combat MILITARY</b>
		<i>(Faithful, superior, glorious)</i>	<i>(Sovereign, transcendent)</i>
<b>God's Sovereignty</b>	Forgives transgressors and enacts our future salvation	Honors lowly mortals and humbles the falsely proud	Defeats spiritual opposition and rules the world
<b>God's Righteousness</b>	Punitive justice	Covenantal faithfulness	Cosmic power
<b>Sin</b>			
<b>Sin</b>	Transgression and Lawbreaking	Dishonor and Disloyalty	Insubordination and Idolatry
<b>Sinfulness</b>	Total depravity	Complete unacceptability	Utter vulnerability
<b>Violation</b>	God's laws and justice	God's face and glory	God's power and authority
<b>Sinners</b>	Condemned	Rejected	Cursed
<b>Consequences of Sin</b>	Judgment / Punishment	Disgrace and impurity	Domination and bondage
<b>Emotions of Sin</b>	Regret	Unworthiness	Anxiety
<b>The Fall (<i>Genesis 3</i>)</b>	Shifted blame	Covered nakedness	Hid in fear
<b>Cultural solutions</b>	Justify, confess, restitution	Cover, flee, hide	Animism, black magic
<b>False Hope</b>	Morality, works, merit	Identity, connections, name	Rituals, secrets, charms
<b>The OT laws reveals</b>	Our moral failure	Our defilement and separation	Our idolatry
<b>Jesus</b>			
<b>Christ</b>	Substitute & Sacrifice	Mediator & Brother	Conqueror & Liberator
<b>Jesus' Life</b>	Lived sinlessly	Jesus leaves glory to glorify the Father	Jesus arrives to destroy the devil's work
<b>Jesus' Death</b>	Bears the punishment for our moral transgressions	Removes our shame and restores God's face/honor	Defeats spirits and power
<b>Atonement Theory</b>	Penal Substitution	Satisfaction	Ransom
<b>Jesus' resurrection</b>	Assurance of future salvation	Divine honor for the shamed	Victory over Satan & death
<b>Salvation</b>			
<b>Salvation</b>	Innocence and Forgiveness	Honor and Face	Power and Freedom
<b>Repentance</b>	From works- righteousness ( <i>stop trying to please God with good deeds</i> )	From boasting ( <i>resist using cultural systems to promote your status</i> )	From Idolatry ( <i>abandon false power and magical rituals</i> )
<b>Grace overcomes</b>	Wickedness	Worthlessness	Weakness
<b>Forgiveness</b>	Pardons wrongs	Reconciles relationships	Removes strongholds
<b>Reconciliation with God leads to peace with:</b>	<b>Self</b> ( <i>soul, conscience</i> )	<b>People</b> ( <i>family, community</i> )	<b>Creation</b> ( <i>nature, spirits</i> )
<b>Ethics</b>	Love Others	Honor Others	Bless Others

Category	GUILT	SHAME	FEAR
KEY METAPHOR	Courtroom LEGAL	Community RELATIONAL	Combat MILITARY
<b>Assurance of Salvation</b>	Am I saved and morally acceptable?	Am I part of the right community?	Do I have power to overcome dark forces?

Taking note of the second sub-category entitled “sin,” one notices the interpretations for *sin* are quite different for each culture of guilt, shame, and fear. In the guilt category, sin is seen as lawbreaking: the sinner is condemned, which requires a penalty. This is accompanied by the emotion of regret, which requires confession and restitution. One’s personal identity is not diminished or at risk, since moral failure is a behavior, and is therefore correctable.

Contrasted to this is the category of *shame*. Here, sin is interpreted as *disloyalty*. Since the mindset is collective, the “disloyal” sinner is rejected by the community. Also rejected, as a by-product, is personal identity. Personal self-esteem diminishes and the emotion of unworthiness grows, causing one to desire to flee and hide, as seen in the Adam and Eve narrative. The solution is not simple compared to the *guilt* category, since unworthiness causes one to see themselves as bad as opposed to having done a bad thing. The final blow is that reputation is lost so that the goal becomes how to regain honor among the community. This dynamic is at the root of the millennial issues.

Jesus addresses this issue when telling the parable referred to as “The Prodigal Son.”<sup>31</sup> It is not actually a story highlighting the son and his waste (the meaning of prodigal), which is a very Western interpretation. Thus, in shame/honor cultures, the name for the parable would never be “prodigal son,” but instead the story of the “restored

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<sup>31</sup> Luke 15:11-32.

son.” It is not a narrative about a son, but centers upon Jesus’ teaching about the father. It is his father who loved the lost son and seeks to restore that son back into the family-community. Honor is restored, signified by the family ring and family mantle ceremoniously placed upon the son.

What, then, is the shame component of Jesus’ story? It was when the son, living in a collective society, demanded his inheritance money. This brought shame to the father since he sought his inheritance prior to the father’s death. Thereby, this son displays disloyalty by acting independently and bringing shame to the family—including the older brother. Interpreting this common parable from the shame/honor culture rather than the guilt/innocence culture, then, tells quite another story. It is not a story, as baby boomer Westerners might interpret it, about a son whose sin was greed and wasteful living, who then repented and was forgiven. This is a judicial view of the parable. Instead, since Jesus ministered in a cultural mindset of shame/honor, it is a story of a shameful and lost son whose disloyalty was covered by his father, and satisfaction was gained and honor restored when he was re-admitted into the family-community.<sup>32</sup>

Moving from the story of the Lost Son brings us to the third dimension, that of fear/power. Here, sin is seen as *insubordination* as opposed the previous two categories, which view sin as either lawbreaking (guilt) or disloyalty (shame). In this category of *fear*, there is a curse attached to the sin of *insubordination*. The sinner has made themselves vulnerable to unseen spirits, and with protection abruptly gone, unrestrained spirits now have free reign to imprison. A liberator is required who has earned the

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<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Bailly, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 279-283. See also G. Campbell Morgan, *The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 211.

necessary power over the spirits and demons and who has acquired the necessary power to work miracles and even raise from the dead. The applicable Christian theology, then, is that Jesus paid the *ransom* through his death on the cross and purchased the necessary power to set captives free. In this thinking there rings that familiar sound of combat and popular metaphor of “spiritual warfare.” The underlying emotion is fear and requires that one do something in order to gain sufficient power. Usually the actions are various prayers, rituals, and fastings, and often the more people participating in the prayer or intercession, the greater the power against the unseen.

### **Theological Blind Spots**

Theological blind spots are a source of confusion when interpreting scripture. These blind spots result from preconceived doctrines about God which, when one is studying the Bible, override the actual telling of scripture. Although genuinely seeking correct interpretation, there is an unseen gravitational draw toward making scripture fit into one’s preconceived theological notions. To properly interpret a passage, a person needs to ask what that passage meant to the original hearer, rather than asking how it applies to their current culture. Interpreters tend to instinctively fill in any missing pieces in a Bible story from their own culture, a habit which should be challenged. This habit is not exegesis but, according to Jackson Wu, “This is eisegesis, whereby one forces foreign ideas into Scripture.”<sup>33</sup> Interpretation should always start at a scripture’s intended meaning for its intended audience before its meaning is expanded to apply outside of that

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<sup>33</sup> Wu, *One Gospel*, 13.

context. Holistic exegetical contextualization interprets scripture from the original author's social and cultural setting.

Apostle Paul notices a blind spot in the church in Corinth. He speaks to the contrast between the mindsets of Jews and Greeks. He was aware that on one side were the Greeks, possessing Western mindsets set upon enlightenment and wisdom. Contrasted was the Eastern Jewish mindset set upon power displays meant to be signs which would verify who was honored by God. Paul says, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."<sup>34</sup> The Jewish Christians and the Greek Christians each looked for something different. Paul does not side with either view, but blends them. He offers a *tertium quid*, a third option, namely that Jesus is both power and wisdom. The early Christians were both Jew and Greek, which resulted in heated disputes and cultural contentions.<sup>35</sup>

These blind spots can be understood by comparing a three-part combination of one's biblical truth, cultural context, and personal theology. Jackson Wu, who teaches missiology to Chinese church leaders, who primarily possess the shame/honor mindset, provides an informative diagram (see Figure 5) in his dissertation *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*.<sup>36</sup> In this diagram, Wu

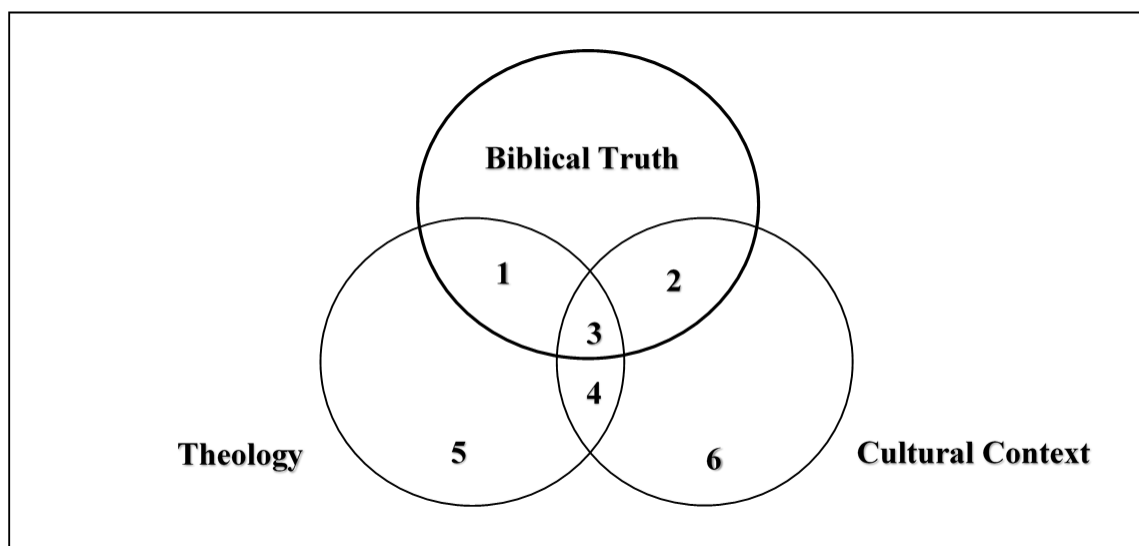
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<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:22-24.

<sup>35</sup> Acts 15:1-21. Notice the Jerusalem Council convened in order to settle heated disputes between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

<sup>36</sup> Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, EMS Dissertation Series, 2012).

brings image to the overlapping areas of truth, context, and theology, which show how blind spots can occur. This image helps to bring clarity to the complexities faced when attempting to reframe a gospel for a different culture. This understanding is critical for bridging the gap between the church and millennials.



*Figure 5. Blind-Spots Diagram by Jackson Wu*

In this diagram, Jackson Wu insists on a connection between *Theology*, *Biblical Truth* and *Culture*. Areas 3 and 4 represent matters of agreement between theology and culture. However, to distinguish *theology* from *biblical truth* suggest that there are areas when one's theology agrees with prevailing culture in an unbiblical way (area 4). This is a blind spot.

More difficult to deal with are areas 1 and 2. In area 1, one's theology is correct but they are outside of, or inconsistent with the culture. Biblical truth confront the culture and so they reject it. Area 2 represents where the culture has accepted a biblical truth and values, perhaps even unknowingly, but that truth is not accepted in one's current theology. The temptation is to reject the culture since it does not fit within the

“accepted” theology, but in fact the culture is ahead in understanding genuine biblical truth.

The tendency remains to reject the culture and press hard the truths expressed in area 1 and, worse, area 5 where one’s theology is neither biblical nor intersects the target culture. This describes places where the church has “lost” the millennials, who are more deeply intertwined within the culture around them. Personal bias can cause a preacher to deny the legitimacy of culture’s insights (area 2). For example, when talking about Western (American and European) theology, we tend to drop the word Western and simply call it “theology,” assuming our understanding is the final, most accurate interpretation, and denying any cultural or historical bias we have. This is a blind spot.

Mark Noll, an American historian, missiologist, and professor at Regent College, makes the point that every interpretation of the gospel is embedded in some cultural form. He says, “The contrast between the West and non-West is never between culture-free Christianity and culturally embedded Christianity, but between varieties of culturally embedded Christianity.”<sup>37</sup> Thus there must be an ongoing dialogue between our theology and our culture, and, of course, the overarching category of biblical truth. This is especially necessary in reframing a gospel to target the culturally embedded millennials.

A significant side note is that, of the three major worldviews—Western, Eastern, and Tribal—the predominant global worldview, often termed “the majority view,” is the Eastern view. This is simply by population and geographic size. At times, missiologists contrast the Western world with the term “Majority world,” or even the “Global South”—

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2009), 44.



which refers to Africa, South-East Asia, the Middle East, Southern and Eastern Europe, and Latin America.<sup>38</sup> This “majority view” correlates to the shame/honor mindset, meaning that of the three, it is the most prominent by population and land mass.

### The Corresponding Atonement Theories

Comparing atonement theories alongside each other helps to clarify them by their differences. Simply defined, the word *atonement* means *to become reconciled*,<sup>39</sup> or repairing that which is broken, like the primary four broken relationships. The English word atonement originally meant “at-one-ment,” as in being “at one,” or in harmony, with someone, deriving from Middle English *attone* or *atoon* meaning “agreed,” or literally “at one.”<sup>40</sup> It is used to describe the saving work that God accomplished through Jesus Christ to reconcile human beings and creation to himself. Through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, relationships are now reconciled and *at-one-ment* has been achieved.

Though some count as many as seven or eight theories of atonement, depending where theological lines of distinction are drawn, there are essentially three primary theories, given here in chronological order of their development: 1) Ransom Theory, 2) Satisfaction Theory, and 3) Substitution Theory.

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<sup>38</sup> Mischke, *Global Gospel*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. “Atonement,” Eleventh ed., 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Niels-Erik Andreasen, “Atonement/Expiation in the Old Testament,” *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. W. E. Mills (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

*Solution for Fear: The Ransom Theory of Atonement*

First is *Ransom Theory* which is the appropriate atonement solution for fear-based cultures. It is generally known as the “classical” theory, and is most often referred to as *Christus Victor*, using Gustaf Aulén’s nomenclature.<sup>41</sup> It is classical in that the early church fathers held this interpretation during the first one thousand years of the church. It established its roots in the third century through the writings and teachings of Origen.<sup>42</sup> This theory essentially teaches that Jesus died as a ransom sacrifice, paid either to Satan (earliest view) or to God the Father. This theory claims that Adam and Eve sold humanity over to Satan, hence justice required that God pay the Devil a ransom. Redemption in this theory means to buy back humanity.<sup>43</sup>

The main controversy with this theory is the act of paying off the devil. As a result, emerging from and linked to this theory is the *Christus Victor* theory, which holds that God did not pay off the devil, or anyone for that matter, but instead defeated the devil. The work was the effort of God and not mankind. Jesus emerges, overpowering evil victoriously and thereby breaking humans free from captivity.

Since the emotional response of *fear* needs be replaced by *power*, *Christus Victor* is the preferred atonement solution for fear-based cultures. Jesus pays the *ransom* through his death on the cross, demonstrating the necessary power. Because God could not simply steal us back, which would be resorting to the Devil’s treacherous ways, a transaction was to take place, a ransom for Satan to release authority over man. The price was Jesus,

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<sup>41</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor* (London: Ashford Colour Press, 1931), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 49.

who gave his own life as the ransom: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>44</sup> This scripture is foundational in the context of the fear-based culture. Along with Origen, Irenaeus and Athanasius expressed versions of this theory by referring to Jesus as “Christus Victor.” This they did to emphasize his anointed victory over evil forces, rather than giving Satan any sense of honor through God agreeing to a negotiation.

An example of this theory can be found in a beautiful narraphor by theologian and author by C. S. Lewis, a modern proponent of *Christus Victor*, in his famous book series *The Lion, The Witch & the Wardrobe*.<sup>45</sup> Aslan the lion represents Jesus, who emerges victoriously resurrected, thereby overpowering the wickedness and evil in Narnia and setting free both the sons of Adam (humanity) and Narnia itself (creation).

#### *Solution for Shame: The Satisfaction Theory of Atonement*

In 1096, Anselm of Canterbury proposed what came to know as the *Satisfaction Theory* for the Atonement. He taught that “whoever does not pay to God the honor due him dishonors him and removes from him what belongs to him; and this removal, or this dishonoring, constitutes as sin.”<sup>46</sup> In this dishonoring of God, we see the root issue that links this theory with our study of shame/honor cultures. Mankind’s first sin dishonored God. Anselm goes on to say, “everyone who sins is obliged to repay to God the honor

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<sup>44</sup> Mark 10:45.

<sup>45</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. 1950), 147-152.

<sup>46</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Dues Homo: Why the God-Man?* 1096, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (San Bernardino, CA: Exfontibus Company, 2015), 25,59.

which he has stolen. This [repayment of stolen honor] constitutes the satisfaction which every sinner is obliged to make to God.”<sup>47</sup>

So, to the mindset of the shame/honor culture, shame is replaced by paying the debt of honor to God, and paying this debt of honor results in the necessary satisfaction. In his view, God’s offended honor could only be satisfied by the sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Specifically to an Asian mindset, because sinners dishonor God, He must be compensated for his loss of face. Jesus satisfied this honor-debt by his humiliating death and thereby saving God’s face. Jackson Wu defines atonement from the shame/honor standpoint as “God’s honor in Christ’s shame.”<sup>48</sup>

The Satisfaction Theory of Atonement was established as doctrine four hundred years prior to the Protestant Reformers, who felt that the satisfaction aspect was insufficient since it references God’s honor rather than his justice and holiness.

#### *Solution for Guilt: Penal Substitutionary Atonement*

Anselm of Canterbury’s *Satisfaction Theory* was too relational for the Reformers and was not judicial enough. This reveals their guilt/innocence paradigm. Therefore, they developed *Penal Substitutionary Atonement Theory*. The Reformers, specifically John Calvin and Luther, took Anselm’s Satisfaction Theory and modified it, adding a more legal framework. The result is that Jesus dies to satisfy God’s wrath against human sin,

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<sup>47</sup> Anselm, *Cur Dues Homo*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 197.

and Jesus is punished (penal) in the place of sinners (substitution).<sup>49</sup> In light of Jesus' death, God can now forgive the sinner his moral breach since the penalty was paid, albeit by another. The retributive requirements of God's justice are met. A legal balancing of ledgers is at the heart of this theory.

This theory is solidly at the center of Western, reformation-oriented mindsets, which is dominant in the seminary educational systems that preachers have historically attended. The emotional response of guilt must be replaced with innocence. This theory proposes that while God is love, He is simultaneously holy and just and thereby must punish guilty transgressors. Therefore, justice requires a payment. But God so loved man that he provides a propitiation, or substitute, to pay the penalty. God imputed the guilt of our sins to Christ, and he, in our place, bore the punishment that we deserve.<sup>50</sup> This was a full payment for sins, which satisfied both the wrath and the righteousness of God, so that He could forgive sinners without compromising His own holy standard.<sup>51</sup>

This theory contrasts with the Satisfaction Theory in that God is not *satisfied* with a debt of justice paid by Jesus, but is satisfied instead with punishing Jesus as a propitiation for, or in the place of, mankind. The focus is upon the punishment necessary to pay sin's debt. This is the critical ingredient in this doctrine, one which is at the core of why the modern Western church is losing their millennial generation.

This generation has difficulty with the penal/courtroom image of God the Father. This image does not resonate with them and thereby sends them on a quest for a more

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<sup>49</sup> C. Baxter Kruger, *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam* (Jackson, MS: Perichoresis, 2003), 45.

<sup>50</sup> Key supporting scriptures: Isaiah 53:6,12; Romans 3:23-25; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:1.

<sup>51</sup> "Penal Substitutionary Atonement," Theopedia, November 1, 2018, <http://www.theopedia.com/penal-substitutionary-atonement>.

loving God. For the church to retain the millennials may require yet another reformation of the theory of atonement, this time backing away from the penal aspect of the sixteenth-century reformers and reverting to earlier thinking of the church fathers, which were more oriented around the Satisfaction Theory of atonement.

Correcting the central problem of the millennials' exodus from church may require a reframing of the gospel's core atonement theory away from an innocence/guilt mindset (Penal Substitutionary Atonement) and toward an honor/shame mindset (Satisfaction Theory of Atonement). In effect, this means shifting away from the Protestant Reformers' thinking to more shame/honor-friendly atonement theology, oriented around a restoration of honor in a relationship with God, self, others, and even creation.

### **Shame Status-Reversal as a Primary Biblical Theme**

A gospel reframed around shame/honor would then focus attention away from guilt as the penalty of sin, putting attention instead upon the shame status-reversal demonstrated by Jesus' story. As an example, Apostle Paul encapsulates this shame-to-honor gospel in this passage:

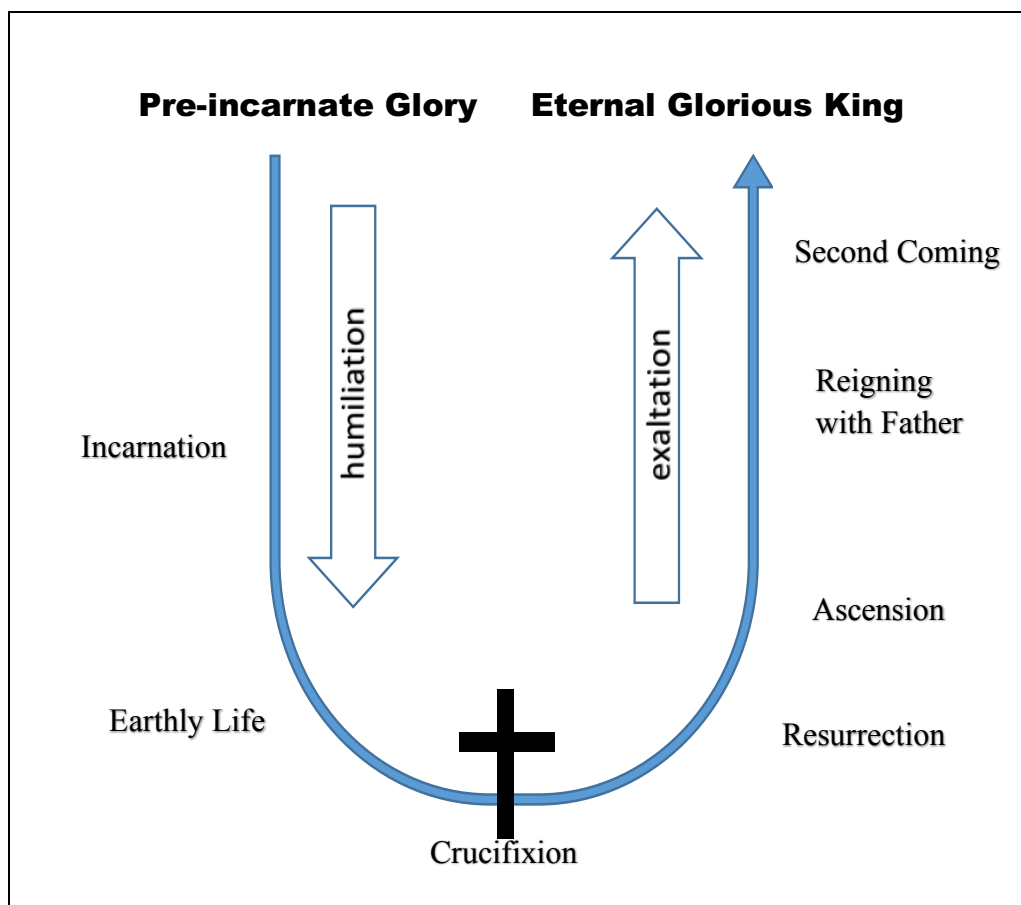
Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Philippians 2:5-11.

This shame status-reversal begins with Jesus in heaven and possessing the form of God. He willingly humbles himself, taking on the lowly form of a bondservant, even humbling himself to the point of the most humiliating of executions—that of the Roman cross. From this lowest point, then, there is a startling status-reversal which changes direction upward again toward gaining honor, even honor at the highest level ever awarded. This story speaks to a shame/honor culture in that God walked in the paths of humility and was shamed and even wrongfully treated, something to which they can easily relate. However, the reversal is actually a double reversal since Jesus resurrects and, now living, has paid the honor-debt, having passed through the deepest shame and thereby satisfying and restoring God's honor. God, in turn, bestows the highest honor upon Jesus by giving him the highest name (representing a reputation of honor), which is above all other on earth and in heaven. In the end, all this brings glory to God the Father.

Here is a chart from Verner Mischke illustrating the *shame status-reversal* which becomes the core graphic for understanding a gospel reframed for millennials.



*Figure 6. Honor Status-Reversal<sup>1</sup>*

Observe the central theme from the diagram (Figure 6) that after Jesus' public humiliation through the crucifixion, he is rewarded by highly exalted honor. This status-reversal is the essence of the gospel narrative, and is especially central for the preaching to people from the shame/honor culture.

This status-reversal theme is seen in Paul's teachings to the Romans of being "baptized into Christ Jesus," and being "baptized unto his death," as identification with his humiliating shame.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in



the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.<sup>53</sup>

Though beginning with identifying with Jesus' shame, Paul finishes with a promise of sense of the newness of life united with Jesus in his life. This relates to the issues of the shame/honor culture's goal—that of being restored in community, and united not only to God, but to others in an authentic and whole-hearted life. It could be argued that the shame status-reversal is not a side-thought, helpful only to those of a shame/honor mindset, but instead is at the very heart of Jesus' story and is useful to all people.

### **The Ephesian Application Using Guilt, Shame, and Fear**

Focusing on the *shame/honor* aspect in this model is not to say that either of the two other theories of atonement are obsolete, only that they are less helpful for those experiencing the shame/honor culture. Interestingly, Apostle Paul addresses all three mindsets in his letter to the Ephesians and presents a working example of a three-dimensional gospel. The city of Ephesus, like many major urban centers of Paul's day as well as today, contained people of all three cultures, and therefore Paul brings each an appropriate gospel.

The story of the Ephesian riot in Acts 19 is an example of guilt, shame, and fear working together in a single setting. Paul preached the gospel of the kingdom boldly for two years, "and God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their

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<sup>53</sup> Romans 6:3-5.

diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.”<sup>54</sup> People were released from satanic bondage. This is a demonstration of God’s great power to overcome the people’s fears. Then the seven sons of Sceva the high priest arrive at Ephesus. Seeking power, they attempt to appropriate God’s power, as demonstrated through Paul, over evil spirits and it backfires. The evil spirits ignore their false authority, overpowering all seven men. This was a power-encounter useful to those of the fear/power mindset.

This fear/power demonstration leads to a shame/honor demonstration, as these seven dignified and highly honored men run out of the room naked and wounded. Their failure of power now becomes a social disgrace. However, God is honored because of the event: “This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”<sup>55</sup> Many believed and transferred their allegiance from the occult to the all-powerful God. They burned their valuable magic books in a public display as a show of honor to God. We see the interplay between the fear/power mindset and the shame/honor mindset clearly here.

The fallout from this incident escalates into a city-center riot, due to the shameful loss of economy for artisans creating occult paraphernalia that eventually must be brought before the courts to discover if Paul is guilty of the artisans’ accusations. Since this narrative concludes in the courtroom, we can see the interplay between all three issues of fear, shame, and guilt.

Much later, as Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, he is conscious of the three dynamics at work in the people of that city and addresses all three in his epistle.

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<sup>54</sup> Acts 19:11-12.

<sup>55</sup> Acts 19:17 (NKJV).

To counter guilt, Paul writes (Ephesians 2:8) that salvation is a gift, which is freely given by God's grace through faith. Humans were made innocent by the propitiatory work of Jesus, which was not a work of mankind's own doing.

To counter shame, Paul writes (Ephesians 2:12), "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise." This is the separation, or shunning, from a community which resulted from mankind's sin. But the solution comes in the next verse: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." In Jesus, mankind is restored and brought near—a much-honored thing in the eyes of this society.

To counter fear, Paul encourages the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:10-12) to "put on the strength of his might." They are to become strong and powerful. They are, according to the next verse, to stand against the schemes of the devil, and furthermore, engage in warfare against "rulers, authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."<sup>56</sup> This clearly targets the fear/power mindsets that were at the foundation of Ephesus, reminding the believers there of the power encounters of their congregation's fledgling days. All three mindsets are, then, intertwined and ministered to in his epistle.

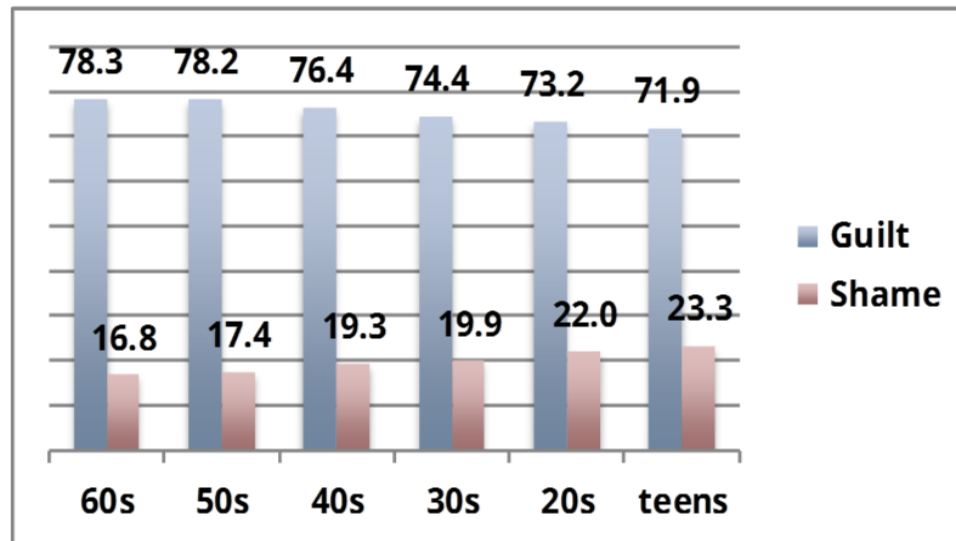
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<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 6:12.

### CHAPTER 3: SHAME DYNAMICS

There is a rise of shame in America. When once there was a crisp distinction that the West experienced primarily guilt and the East primarily shame, this is not the case any longer. In 1946, Ruth Benedict, the World War Two anthropologist who popularized the “West = guilt; East = shame” distinction, observed, “But shame is an increasingly heavy burden in the United States and guilt is less extremely felt than in early generations.”<sup>1</sup> But is this seventy-two-year-old observation still true today?

Data from *The Culture Test* agrees that, indeed, shame is growing as a significant emotion in the West.<sup>2</sup> Table 5 makes it evident that shame is increasing in the most recent age groups.



*Figure 7. The Portion of Guilt and Shame per Age Group*

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Georges, “The Culture Test.”

This graph reveals a growing trend that the new generations are experiencing an increase in shame, and simultaneously a decrease in guilt emotions. This survey agrees with Benedict's 1946 introductory idea that shame was not just a Japanese issue, but that shame was becoming an increasingly heavy burden also in the United States. In fact, this shift seems to be picking up speed. This shift is a sign that the emotional needs of congregations, and those outside of church, are changing.

### **Emerging Awareness of Shame/Honor Dynamics in Today's Culture**

Since larger amounts of younger Americans are experiencing shame, it is vital there be an increased awareness of the shame-honor culture and its dynamics, especially for preachers, who can then reframe a gospel which might reach their hearts. However, increasing awareness is not without difficulty, as many people involved in cross-cultural ministry have come to learn.

Understanding how to interact cross-culturally has occupied the interest of both international businessmen and Christian missionaries. But there is a significant difference between businessmen and missionaries on how they perceive another culture. This difference is best described using an iceberg as a metaphor. It is commonly known that what you perceive above the water is but a small portion of what lies beneath the surface. This is equally true for the study of cross-cultural interaction. Most businesspeople, for example, are eager to study only the tip of the iceberg. This is understandable, because it is the first thing that people are aware of when encountering another culture. What are the observable things?

According to Brooks Peterson, who uses an *iceberg metaphor* in his study of cultural intelligence, "the tip of the iceberg is anything you can perceive with your five

senses.”<sup>3</sup> These include such things as food, architecture, language, music, clothing, gestures, eye contact, pace of life, and art and literature. Though the tip of iceberg can be interesting, it tells only a small percentage of what actually defines that culture.

According to Peterson, “just as approximately 80% of an iceberg’s mass is underwater, perhaps 80% of the important aspects of culture are also contained in the invisible and usually unconscious characteristics of culture.”<sup>4</sup> This eighty percent is “under the surface,” and undiscernible at cursory glance; however, it is weighty and foundational.

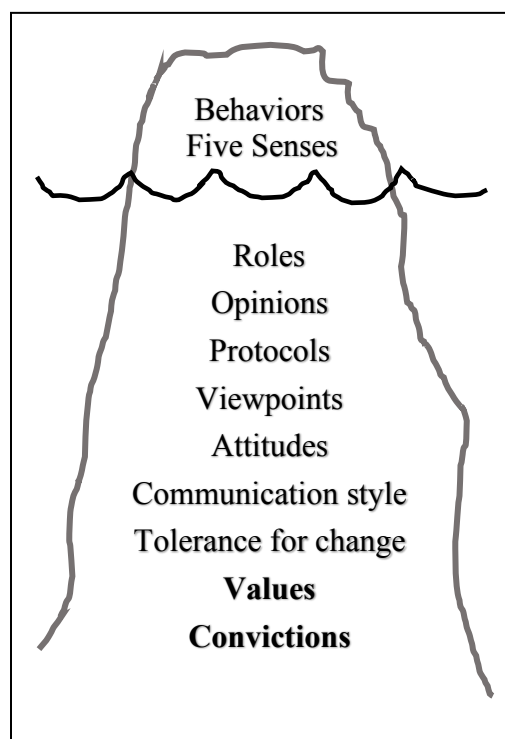


Figure 8. Iceberg Metaphor for Cultural Identifiers

What things are under the surface? These significant things, according to Peterson, are: opinions, viewpoints, attitudes, philosophies, values, and convictions. These provide the foundation for what you see at the top. They can be expanded to

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<sup>3</sup> Brooks Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence: A Guide to Working with People from Other Cultures* (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 20.

include roles in society or family, preferences for leadership, communication styles, motivations for achievement, and more. The final two from this list, *values* and *convictions*, are highly significant because this is where one locates the foundational mindsets of shame, guilt, and fear.

The bottom of the iceberg is foundational for what is observable above. By understanding the underlying causes for behaviors, one can properly interpret the behavior. There is a tendency for a person, when noticing a strange behavior in another culture, to consider it a negative aspect of that culture. But this could be a mistake.

For example, it has been negatively pronounced of Eastern-culture people by Westerners that, “You cannot really trust them because they tell you what you want to hear in attempt to save face.” To Westerners, this appears as an ethics violation: lying. But with increased cultural awareness, especially regarding the shame dynamic behind such a statement, light is shed upon a former blind spot. For the Easterner, the damage of public shame is a much greater than any damage done by withholding information. For them, “truth” eventually is brought to the forefront, but seldom at the first encounter. There is a protocol one must traverse before full disclosure is awarded. To them, this is not lying. This is very similar to the fact that the Western expected response to, “How are you?” is “fine,” regardless of this answer is far from the truth. If the issue of genuine health is pressed further, then the full disclosure is released. One needs to understand the culture in order to know the depth of response expected.

The predominant background culture of the Bible narratives are shame/honor, so Westerners can easily misunderstand cultural protocols in these narratives and thereby

misconstrue their meaning and message.<sup>5</sup> Since the predominate cultural value of the Middle East, where the Bible setting occurs, is shame/honor culture, then it follows that the main cultural value of the Bible is also honor and shame. All too often, however, scripture is misread with “Western eyes.”<sup>6</sup>

Verner Mischke constructed a helpful chart showing specific levels of awareness of honor/shame as a theme in the Bible, especially as seen from the perspective of a Westerner. This chart contains words chosen to describe the five levels of awareness, the lowest level being that of total unawareness and the whole subject being a blind spot, up to the highest, that of understanding honor/shame dynamics “as central to the Bible’s narrative as doxological destiny for Christ and believers.” This chart names and reveals levels of shame/honor awareness. For example, in the preceding instance where *saving face* was interpreted as lying by the person from the guilt/innocence mindset, the issue became an *ethical* issue rather than an attempt at understanding what is actually occurring in that verbal exchange. One who regards it an *untruth* reveals a lower awareness of honor/shame dynamics. This is termed as honor/shame level 2 (H/S2) and is classified as inadequate understanding, or a negative (see Table 6).

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<sup>5</sup> Verner Mischke, *The Global Gospel*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 74.



Table 6. Levels of Awareness of Honor and Shame

<div> <div>Positive</div> <div>No Honor/Shame Awareness</div> <div>H/S 1      H/S 2      H/S 3      H/S 4      H/S 5</div> <div>←      →</div> <div>High Honor/Shame Awareness</div> <div>Negative</div> </div>				
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
Unawareness	Ethical	Functional	Evangelical	Teleological
Blind spot	Inferior Values	Bible Cultures	Gospel Cultures	Glorious Kingdom
Little to no awareness of honor/shame dynamics: cultural / theological blind spot	Awareness of only the unethical or dark side of honor/shame	Awareness of honor/shame as the pivotal cultural value of Bible societies leads to removal of Western lenses for interpreting Scripture	Awareness of honor/shame dynamics as central to the meaning and proclamation of the gospel of Christ	Awareness of honor/shame dynamics as central to the Bible's narrative of a doxological destiny for Christ and for believers from among all the peoples of the earth.

Notice in the table that the *Gospel Cultures* section (level 4) is a heightened awareness of the central cultural gospel meaning. This is necessary before one can reframe this meaning effectively into a relevant story for a differing culture. This issue is the central tenant in this dissertation which is to reframe the gospel in a culturally sensitive manner in order to be understood by the multi-cultured millennial generation.

This awareness is more difficult for the baby-boomer preacher, who, for the most part, has approached biblical interpretation through Western eyes. For the current millennial preachers, who are increasing in shame/honor awareness, a reframing of the gospel using a more accurate biblical shame/honor cultural interpretation becomes easier.

This move toward greater awareness requires a humility such as Christ modeled for us by his incarnation. Christ's attitude is first a downward move toward humiliation,

as was graphically displayed in the last chapter of this dissertation (Figure 6). Christ's downward move toward humiliation is revealed when Paul says, "And being found in appearance as a man, He [Jesus] humbled Himself."<sup>7</sup> If one maintains a superiority attitude, holding only the mindset of their previous training, they will miss the next-to-come upward swing of honor. This shame-reversal manifests when the hearer understands and believes upon Jesus through a reframed gospel, one oriented toward a shame-to-honor progression.

As one becomes a believer in Jesus gift of honor, they begin to cross over the bridge constructed by the culturally aware preacher. This reframed gospel has allowed for this authentic connection to Jesus life and empowerment, as originally understood in scripture. This preacher, especially if Western mindset originally, has been reframed personally by heightened cultural awareness, and models the biblical theme of shame/honor reversal: moving from the humiliating assumptions to honoring listeners. Due to their heightened awareness, this preacher is now able to embark on mission cross-culturally.

### **Comparing Honor/Shame vs. Guilt/Innocence Worldviews**

To understand this *shame/honor* dynamic more fully, it is helpful to compare it directly beside the predominantly Western mindset of *guilt/innocence*. The role of *shame* in interpersonal relationships, which is a key theme, distinguishes *shame* from the results of *guilt*. Shame dramatically affects interpersonal relationships, especially in a community, compared to *guilt*, which is far less impactful on interpersonal relationships.

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:8.

Psychologists June Tangney and Rhonda Dearing found in their extensive empirical research that “shame is an extremely painful and ugly feeling that has a negative impact of interpersonal behavior.”<sup>8</sup> They went on to discover that both shame and guilt are more than just *states of feelings*, but are what they term *proneness*, which is the fallback tendency of a certain way of thinking developed by their culture. It is *proneness* which is the focus of this dissertation.

To fully understand shame dynamics, it is valuable to directly compare them to those of guilt-dynamics. This chart, by Brooks Peterson, contrasts the two cultural views using generalizations of five key values—each of which contrasts the other culture.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 33.

Table 7. Peterson's Five Basic Culture Scales<sup>10</sup>

<b>Guilt/Innocence Worldview</b> <i>primarily Western</i>	<b>Honor/Shame Worldview</b> <i>primarily Majority World or Eastern</i>
North America, Northern Europe, Australia, and New Zealand	Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East, Southern and Eastern Europe
Generalizations about what cultures value	
<b>More Guilt-based</b>	<b>More Shame-based</b>
<b>Equality</b> More likely to measure worth of a person based on individual merits and performance	<b>Hierarchy</b> More likely to measure worth of a person based on age, position, title, rank, or tradition
<b>Direct</b> More likely to communicate in a direct manner, face to face, to “cut to the chase”	<b>Indirect</b> More likely to communicate indirectly through stories or a mediator in order to “save face”
<b>Individual</b> More likely to value the uniqueness of each person, individual human rights, and “my own destiny”	<b>Group</b> More likely to value the opinion of the family, harmony in the community, welfare of the group
<b>Task</b> More likely to value work accomplished, efficiency in “getting the job done”	<b>Relationship</b> More likely to value personal relationships; social harmony trumps efficiency
<b>Risk</b> More likely to venture out rapidly, experiment with ideas, not knowing how things will work out	<b>Caution</b> More likely to proceed cautiously, slowly, to keep what one has gained, even though it may be small

Notice the contrasts in Table 7 between Honor/Shame and Guilt/Innocence regarding their five highly held values. They are quite opposite in each category. These contrasts offer insight into their cultural tendencies, and by comparing them to each other, focus is gained. For example, while the *guilt/innocence* view is interested in *equality*—measuring the worth of a person based on individual merits, the *shame/honor* view is interested in *hierarchy*, and is more likely to measure the worth of a person based

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<sup>10</sup> Mischke, *Global Gospel*, 41. This table is summary adaptation from Brooks Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 40.

on age, position, title, rank, or tradition. These issues of age, position, title, rank, and tradition carry enormous influence in the *shame/honor* culture, a reality not readily grasped by anyone outside of this culture. Once again, one can see the overarching theme that *guilt/innocence* is individualistic, and shame/honor is collective.

Timothy Tenet agrees, saying that “In western cultures, even from an early age, independence is valued over interdependence.”<sup>11</sup> Western culture young adults are taught to be independent, and childhood and teen years were spent training for independence as an adult. Tenet goes on to show how training by parents is vastly different in Western and Eastern cultures:

In a highly individualistic culture the ethical values and social mores of the larger society must be reinforced through a process of internalizing codes of conduct so that the reference point is more internal and personal rather than external and public. Parents teach children what is right and wrong and expect that the internalization of those principles and guidelines will serve as a reference point throughout life. Shame-based culture relies heavily on public opinion, outward appearances and group pressure to enforce its norms.<sup>12</sup>

Understanding this is the result of applied semiotics, or interpreting signs properly. One thing might look like another at first glance, but they could be opposites. For example, surprisingly, as the millennials leave church, it appears that they are moving away from honoring their tradition, which is an *independent* and Western action. However, it is quite the opposite. They are actually moving toward the Eastern *collective* trait as they form their own communities. These are not communities based upon individual merit, but instead acceptance. This belonging is based more upon that particular community’s values of authenticity, a general acceptance of non-perfection,

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<sup>11</sup> Tenet, *World Christianity*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> Tenet, *World Christianity*, 81.

and a desire to walk together in life. In short, millennials seek acceptance and belonging. That they are moving away from church is not to be seen as a sign of them becoming independent, but actually embracing interdependency. This is one of the biggest shifts resulting from this rise in the shame dynamic in America—that of moving from individualism toward collectiveness. Millennials who feel pushed out or left behind by the current church are not acting as independents, but are forming groups, which is a semiotic indicator of a shift toward the shame/honor mindset.

The third category in Peterson's chart (Table 7) shows *relationship and social harmony* as a strong value for the shame/honor prone. Millennials are no longer content being a spectator at a church event, but desire interactive communities, which includes interactive dialogue. The current church, designed upon guilt/innocence, views *task*—that of the duty to attend the church service—of greatest value for an individual. It comes down to *duty* for one and *relationship* for the other. This contrast illustrates well one of the differences between guilt and shame.

Another significant contrast between guilt and shame is seen in how guilt cultures are more *direct* and shame cultures are more *indirect*. This direct/indirect contrast is evident in the example of the direct Westerner who misread the indirect Easterner's response as *he only says what I want to hear*. The Westerner read it as an intentional lie, and the Easterner read it as the first stage in a loopy, indirect protocol of relational interaction. This single issue of *indirectness* is the source of much communication confusion between these two cultures.

By looking over Table 7, the differences between guilt and shame proneness sharpens. All five categories combine to help see the signs regarding the millennials'

exodus from church. This understanding is vital in the task of reframing a gospel that they can hear. For example, since shame/honor worldviews prefer indirect more than direct communication, then preaching bullet points and propositions must give way to stories with metaphors. This is the contrast between Sweet's *narraphor*-style preaching and traditional propositional preaching.<sup>13</sup> Sweet encourages reaching this generation in their vernacular, and since they are a generation raised on easy access to movie-form narratives, then *narraphor* is an appropriate method. The movies that they grew up with are elaborate narratives, with metaphors, and not the skeletal bullet-point propositions spoken in a direct manner that reveal an innocence/guilt culture. Therefore, reframed preaching suited for millennials is best when heavy with story and metaphor.

### **America's Quest for Wholehearted Living**

Awareness of the shame dynamic is growing in America, and its result is an increase in desire for worthiness and belonging. As evidenced, there is an increasing level of shame-awareness among young Americans. In addition, shame-awareness and shame's effects on vitality have become a point of interest not only in popular settings, but also in academia.

How did shame become a topic of academic discourse? To see how this occurred requires a brief historical review. The roots appear to start with anthropologist Ruth Benedict in her 1946 analysis<sup>14</sup> of Japanese culture, a study undertaken on behalf of the United States government as a result of WWII, in an attempt to understand Japanese

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<sup>13</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 37.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (New York: Meridian Books, 1946).

mindsets. Shame was now upon the academic table, with not only anthropologists but psychologists began to enter the arena. In 1953, Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer published *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytical and Cultural Study*.<sup>15</sup> Note the use of “cultural” in the title, which shows an overlap in concentrations. Soon (1954) Eugene Nida<sup>16</sup> significantly linked shame and guilt with a third emotion, fear, bringing these into a trilogy of human emotional responses. By, 1966, Jean Peristiany edited a collection of essays<sup>17</sup> on honor and shame in Mediterranean cultures, which included an important study by Julian Pitt-Rivers that led to a deeper appreciation of shame in biblical times. In 1981, Bruce Malina<sup>18</sup> popularizing the aspects of shame and honor in biblical cultures. This led to the study of shame as an academic subject for anthropologists, psychologists, and more recently, theologians and pastors. An example is the fine 2010 work of pastor John Forrester: *Grace for Shame: The Forgotten Gospel*,<sup>19</sup> which not only brings forward useful solutions for pastors to implement, but skillfully blends academia and popular writing into a handbook on the subjects of shame and guilt which can be understood and helpful for all Christians.

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<sup>15</sup> Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer, *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytical and Cultural Study* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1953).

<sup>16</sup> Nida, *Customs and Cultures*.

<sup>17</sup> Jean G. Peristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>18</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> John Forrester, *Grace for Shame: The Forgotten Gospel* (Toronto: Pastor’s Attic Press, 2010).



A 2015 *Christianity Today* article Andy Crouch claims “that honor and shame are becoming dominant forces in the American context.”<sup>20</sup> Without sharing what percentage of American Adults are experiencing this, he does make a good point that *shame/honor* is a topic no longer relegated to academia, but it has merged into mainstream thinking.

In 2012, when research psychologist Brené Brown spoke about shame in a Ted Talk presentation, something caught hold in the hearts of America.<sup>21</sup> This particular twenty-minute talk has now been watched over ten million times. Brown introduces the concept of “wholehearted” living two years earlier in her popular book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*.<sup>22</sup> This term of *wholehearted* adequately describes the millennials’ quest to shed shame and hiding and live authentically, embracing who they are. Brown’s message and popularity has skyrocketed, especially following a March 2013 television interview by Oprah Winfrey on the Super Soul Sunday where host Oprah revealed that she and Brown are “soul mates.”<sup>23</sup>

Psychologists like Brené Brown, as well as the respected scholar Dan Allender, use the concept of shame to describe an inner sense of unworthiness.<sup>24</sup> It is often rooted in trauma and embarrassing experiences. This sort of shame is deeply interior, and is at

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<sup>20</sup> Andy Crouch, “The Return of Shame,” *Christianity Today*, March 2015, [http://andy-crouch.com/articles/the\\_return\\_of\\_shame](http://andy-crouch.com/articles/the_return_of_shame).

<sup>21</sup> Brené Brown, “Listening to Shame,” *TED Talk*, March 2012, video, 20:32, [https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_listening\\_to\\_shame](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame)

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Gifts of Imperfection*.

<sup>23</sup> Kate Torgovnick, “Brené Brown Interviewed by Oprah in a Two-part Episode of ‘Super Soul Sunday.’ TED Blog, March 2013, <https://blog.ted.com/brene-brown-interviewed-by-oprah-in-a-two-part-episode-of-super-soul-sunday/>

<sup>24</sup> Brené Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me: Making the Journey from “What Will People Think?” to “I Am Enough”* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 4; and Dan Allender, *Healing the Wounded Heart* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016).

the root of why millennials are responding as they are in both leaving church and in attempting to locate where and to whom they belong. They are looking for their self-worth and their community.

### **Pastoral Awareness and Applied Grace**

At the heart of shame is *exposure*, or a sense of being vulnerable. This is why the first and natural response is the desire to hide or to be covered, as evidenced by the reaction seen in the Adam and Eve narrative. Shame, therefore, is a by-product of self-awareness, which is why it is a deeply internal experience. That which is at risk when one is shamed is their very sense of identity. For this reason, shame is more complicated to overcome than guilt. Again, guilt is a result of an action and shame is a result of negative personhood, or shame is about “who I am” and guilt is about “what I did.” As one comes out of hiding and overcomes shame, they therefore improve their sense-esteem and develop a personal sense of worth.

There will be a different ministry application for the pastor or church leader to address shame as opposed to guilt. What guilt seeks is forgiveness, but what shame seeks is acceptance. This acceptance is both self-acceptance and also group acceptance. It is this dimension of adding multiple other people which makes the healing process complicated. How to gain honor from the group one is hiding from is not simple compared to restoring innocence. This restoration of acceptance by the group is a grace.

Before a discussion of grace and shame solutions, it is important to understand that the word *shame* in English has a singular meaning. Sadly, this is a case where the English vocabulary is limited and becomes a hindrance. In the biblical language of Greek, and also in French and German, there exist two distinct words for *shame*. One

refers to bad shame, the type we have defined and have had in mind throughout this study, and the other refers to good shame. There is a strong argument that shame does have a good side. This is surprising at first glance to an English-speaker.

There is an alternative view to blatantly saying that all shame is a bad thing. Some shame is useful, and can be understood when seeing the difference. There are two words to distinguish good shame, or *discretionary* shame, from bad shame, or *disgrace* shame. The Greek uses *aischyne* for *disgrace* shame (e.g., Hebrews 12:2; Jude 1:13) and *aido* for *discretionary* shame.<sup>25</sup> This *aido* is translated *propriety* in the English Standard Version from Timothy 2:9, which refers to women dressing with propriety and modest apparel. Some go as far as to believe that the loss of propriety, or good shame, is a major factor in the current ethical downturn. James Twitchell, a social commentator, argues that the loss of “good” shame is contributing to cultural deterioration in the United States.<sup>26</sup> This is evident from the Barna Survey, elaborated early in this study, which revealed that America’s raised-in-church young have serious questions about sexuality and defining which actions actually constitute *sin*.<sup>27</sup>

This distinction becomes important for understanding pastoral roles in ministering grace for shame. If shame is *exposure*, then the healing becomes appropriate exposure, or discretion. There is little healing virtue in one blurting out, without discretion, all their shameful actions or thoughts. Yes, while confession is part of the healing, the one to

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<sup>25</sup> Robert H. Albers, “Shame: A Dynamic in the Etiology of Violence,” *Dialog* 36, no. 4 (1997): 255.

<sup>26</sup> James B. Twitchell, *For Shame: The Loss of Common Decency in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 153.

whom the shame is confessed must be a trusted listener, and capable of walking one out of the cave of shame, in order for the healing of shame to begin. Without discretion, or “good shame,” further shame and dishonor rise, resulting in further damage to self-identity. Expressing shame with no discretion can exacerbate rather than mitigate it.

Thus, “shame is like a thermostat,” says therapist Suzanne Retzinger, which is, “helping human beings maintain the appropriate level of closeness and distance from others.”<sup>28</sup> Discretion helps guard personal boundaries. This appears to be where many millennials find themselves. They simply abandon their churches when feeling valueless to the church. They are operating out of discretion (good shame), and do not want to challenge the institution. Instead they set sail, searching for a safe place where they may emerge from hiding and be exposed to worthiness. In the communities they seek, there is honor and acceptance by others. The point being that discretion protects against further bad shame. As pastor John Forrester says, “disgrace shame follows us, but discretionary shame precedes us.”<sup>29</sup> Discretion restrains us and preserves us from grandiosity.

Disgrace shame, which has become the major focus of shame-therapy, is shame that robs a person of intimacy with other people. Here are some of the common characteristics of disgraced shame-based people: isolation, a feeling of not belonging, out of touch with feelings, depression, negativity, painfully self-focused, poor communication, and a sense of powerlessness.<sup>30</sup> Intimacy with others is missing, the very

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<sup>28</sup> Suzanne Retzinger, “Shame in the Therapeutic Relationship,” in *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, ed. Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 209.

<sup>29</sup> Forrester, *Grace for Shame*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Marie Power, *Shame: Thief of Intimacy* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 1998), 19.

issue for which God created Eve to remedy Adam's aloneness.<sup>31</sup> With guilt, there is something to be done. One can seek innocence through forgiveness or restitution, but with "shame there is no significant 'I' to do anything," as Forrester insightfully points out.<sup>32</sup> The "self" is hidden and kept out of sight, and senses no assignment for action. This non-action is part of what makes shame therapy more difficult. Shame is reticence for exposure, and the shame-based person lives under a cloud of constant awareness of that exposure, which is unpredictable and seemingly unforgiving.

An intriguing and road-tested approach to shame therapy is offered by The Allender Center of Seattle,<sup>33</sup> founded by psychologist and theologian Dan Allender. The core to the Allender theory is the belief that the journey of healing invites one to move from a place of contempt, shame, and ambivalence, to one of compassion, goodness, and delight (correspondingly). This healing is to occur through telling one's story with truth and integrity, while grieving one's wounds and offering blessing to the parts yet bound to the cursed story (Adam and Eve's fall). Allender believes that it is necessary for others to help us walk out of our shame, like one might need the assistance of a light-bearer to help them walk out of a dark cave. The working strategy is that as one shares their story with trusted others who are able to name both one's deep goodness as well as their woundedness, one can grow a deeper capacity to know and live into their calling and also to engage in life-giving relationships with God and others.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Genesis 2:18.

<sup>32</sup> Forrester, *Grace for Shame*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> The Allender Center at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, <https://theallendercenter.org/>

<sup>34</sup> "The Allender Theory," The Allender Center, Nov 14, 2018, <https://theallendercenter.org/about/allender-theory/>

What are the steps of grace that one can take in order to begin to walk out of cave of shame? First is telling your story. Although there is warning about the dangers of revealing your shame, both Allender and Brené Brown encourage naming and identifying past shame instances. This is to be done to trusted people who can help you walk out of the shame. There is power in telling the story. The act of telling the story requires that you own your “shame story.” This is also so that one can further help others locked in shame understand their stories. Storytelling is the beginning step of walking out of the cave of shame.

The second step is to learn to integrate your story into your cultural worldview, and especially integrate it into your personal view of God. At this point, you can begin to understand the work of Jesus on the cross through your lenses of guilt, shame, and fear. The exercise must move from intellectual to emotional. The presence of Jesus is required, since he is more than a teacher, but is life himself.<sup>35</sup> The pastor or therapist then moves to coaching and assisting the person as they meet the living Christ. Finally, the shame-bound individual must see themselves no longer alone, but imagine holding the hand of Jesus, who lovingly forgives and accepts them. Instilled by Jesus is a sense of calling to a higher purpose and greater family. He is offering hope for a return to humanity’s original design.

Embracing the full understanding of God’s original design for humanity brings hope and purpose. God’s decrees for his people is for them to be fruitful, fill, multiply

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<sup>35</sup> John 14:8, “I am the way the truth and the LIFE.”

and subdue (problem-solve) creation. This empowers humanity for taking dominion of creation in partnership with the Creator.<sup>36</sup>

The final healing step for shame is in finding a community to belong to. It is here that intimacy can be achieved with God, self, and others. Skills are developed of listening to other people's stories and aligning with them, or what Allender so fondly refers to as "attunement." By this he means being in "tune" with one another, which allows for harmony. A great part of the remaining work on the interior is further accomplished as one continues naming and renaming their personal story. This expands into naming the community and discovering how that named community blends with the Creator's original story.

This shame-solution of naming and renaming brings this study full circle back to the important task of reframing a gospel narrative that can be heard by millennials.

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<sup>36</sup> Genesis 1:28.

## CHAPTER 4:

### IDENTITY – THE PRIMARY QUEST

From ages past, humans have used storytelling to explain the world around them and to identify their place in it. Some of these stories are metaphorical and used to explain the unexplained—images explaining even deeper images. Every person carries a self-story. Best-selling author Gregg Braden, in his new book endorsing intelligent design over Darwin’s evolution, says, “The stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves—and believe—define our lives.”<sup>1</sup> Braden captures the essence of personal *identity* as the way one tells their life story. Everyone has a story, or “put another way,” according to psychologist Dan Allender, “everyone’s life is a story.”<sup>2</sup> Listening to your own story gives clues to your identity. Naming your story is vital to understanding yourself.

### **Who Am I?**

The primary question asked by the millennial generation is, “Who am I?” This has propelled them upon a quest to discover their story and mark their identity. There is great value in gaining an understanding of personal identity. Jean Vanier, a Catholic priest and author, speaks to this value, saying, “To know the answer to *who I am* is to answer what

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<sup>1</sup> Gregg Braden, *Human by Design: From Evolution by Chance to Transformation by Choice* (New York: Hay House, 2017), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Allender, *To Be Told: God Invites You to Coauthor Your Future* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 1.



it means to be fully human.”<sup>3</sup> The need for an interactive community and personal worth begins with the drive for a sense of identity.

Author and seminar leader Gregg Braden asked an auditorium of over a thousand people in London, “If there were one question, the answer of which would define your life and destiny would you want to know what it is?” The crowd unanimously responds, “Yes.” Braden replies, “That one question, the answer to which defines our life and destiny is ‘*Who am I?*’”<sup>4</sup> In his new book, *Human by Design*, Braden states as his foundational thesis: “Everything from our self-esteem to our self-worth, our sense of confidence, our well-being, and our sense of safety, as well as the way we see the world and other people, stems from our answer to the question *Who are we?*”<sup>5</sup> This is the big question.

The stories, images, and metaphors one chooses when talking about themselves paints their self-portrait, at least at that moment. For example, an event in American history reveals the tremendous power given to the person who chooses and names the story. In this case, it was a group, the tobacco industry, who wrote the storyline. Prior to the 1964 report on the dangerous effects of cigarette smoking,<sup>6</sup> big tobacco companies embarked on an advertisement campaign trying to convince the public that cigarettes

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Vanier, “What Does It Mean to Be Fully Human?” video, 4:25, March 11, 2015, emphasis added, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWrru31ZPzo>

<sup>4</sup> Gregg Braden, *Consciousness and Human Evolution Conference*, London, August 25, 2017. <http://london.eventful.com/events/conference-consciousness-human-evolution-/E0-001-103886704-4>. My mentor, Pastor Derek Brown, personally attended and witnessed this event, relaying this significant question directly to me in conversation.

<sup>5</sup> Gregg Braden, *Human by Design: From Evolution by Chance to Transformation by Choice* (New York: Hay House, Inc., 2017), xiii. Emphasis added. Braden combines science and spirituality.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Surgeon General Luther Terry, “The 1964 Report on Smoking and Health, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/ps/retrieve/Narrative/NN/p-nid/60>.

were safe to smoke. They created vignettes which served to propel sales of their product. One example is a Lucky Strike cigarette poster which states, “Face the Facts. When tempted to overindulge [eating], reach for a Lucky instead.”



*Figure 9. Lucky Strike Ad*

The poster (Figure 9) visually compares a drawing of an overweight man next to a finely tuned athlete in action, and by this image it was inferred that cigarette smoking is the healthy alternative to overeating.<sup>7</sup> It was working, until the perception from such messages changed when the story changed. The new story told, after the 1964 Surgeon General’s Report and warning about the dangers of cigarettes, changed the story. The report warned against the serious health hazards of cigarette smoking. The now-famous health-hazard warning is printed on each pack of cigarettes. This illustrates that a belief once shared by the mainstream public, that cigarette smoking is healthy compared to

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<sup>7</sup> “10 Evil Vintage Cigarette Ads Promising Better Health,” Healthcare Administration Degree Programs blog, November 7, 2018, <https://www.healthcare-administration-degree.net/10-evil-vintage-cigarette-ads-promising-better-health/>

overeating, changed when the story changed. Cigarette smoking was clearly named as unhealthy, and this became the new story.

One believes not only their own story, but the stories told about them by their broader community. Confusion regarding one's identity can be the direct result of shame and believing that "I am bad." For one to be walked out of their poor self-image requires the re-naming of their life story. This is best accomplished with help from another person.

### **Identity through Temperament Assessment Tools**

The field of psychology has undertaken naming human traits in an attempt to deliver to individual's images handles to use when naming themselves. Choosing the proper identifier for a certain trait became vital for forming healthy souls.<sup>8</sup> This effort by psychologists blossomed into various personality assessment tools. These are now made generally available as self-assessments which can be secured for nominal costs through the internet. They serve to provide popularly held vocabulary, which proves helpful for dialogue when building business teams, church teams, families, or any group seeking to identify their people's interactive personalities.

Currently, the most popular, according to The Learning Mind Website,<sup>9</sup> an assessment tool provider, is The Myer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).<sup>10</sup> Created by Katherine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Myers, the MBTI is based on the ideas of

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<sup>8</sup> *Soul* in Greek is *psyche*, which is the root for psychology, or the study of the human soul.

<sup>9</sup> "Top 10 Most Popular Personality Assessment Tests (and How You Can Benefit from Them)," The Learning Mind Website, accessed November 8, 2018, <https://www.learning-mind.com/personality-assessment-tests/>

<sup>10</sup> The Meyers-Briggs Foundation Website, <https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/home.htm?bhcp=1>

psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who believed that people understood the world through sensation, intuition, feeling, and thinking. Jung suggested that only one of these psychological functions is powerful most of the time. This MBTI assessment also reveals if one is an introvert or extrovert, an insight useful to enhance social skills and group communication.

Another example of a personality testing tool, and rated second most popular by the Learning Mind Website, is The DISC Assessment.<sup>11</sup> DISC is based upon the ideas of psychologists William Marston and Walter Clarke, and it evaluates behavior. It focuses on the traits of *dominance, inducement, submission, and compliance (DISC)*. Some companies rely on this tool to hire staff, while others use it to gauge an employee's suitability for a job.

Each of the top ten personality tests are sourced from the field of psychology and bring helpful nomenclature for identity. But what about outside of this field? It would seem that since God is the creator of humanity that he would possess vocabulary describing humanities story, which include personality and temperament variances.

If the Bible does address this issue, where are these terms to be found in theology? Has the field of psychology wrongly oversimplified and limited the number of traits to between four and ten, while God has created an unlimited amount of unique people? These answer is yes, the Bible does address this, clearly showing seven distinct personalities woven throughout the sixty-six books from the very first unto to the last book.

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<sup>11</sup> DISC Assessment Tool by Wiley, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://www.discprofile.com/what-is-disc/overview/>

## A Biblical Look at Personality Traits

Certain Bible teachers in the past three decades have proposed that the list recorded in Romans 12:6-8 is a biblical list defining human personal differences (see Table 8). The Apostle Paul mentions a brief list of seven while writing encouragement to the church at Rome. He lists a clear diversity in human functioning, or design, and when the church understands how the church membership interrelates, the coordinated unity creates community strength and a sense of individual purpose for the various members.

*Table 8. Design-Gifts Sourced Biblically*

Romans 12:6-8	
1.	Prophet
2.	Servant
3.	Teacher
4.	Exhorter
5.	Giver
6.	Ruler
7.	Mercy

Among the early founders of this theory is author and conference speaker Katie Fortune.<sup>12</sup> She terms this list “Motivational Gifts,” and has written extensively about these, applying her understanding to marriages, children, church positions, and even business-types. As an early pioneer, she took the liberty of renaming two of the terms: for *prophet* she uses *perceiver*, and the trait *ruler* she replaces with the term *administrator*. According to Fortune, her reasoning for these was to reframe the concepts in an attempt to enhance clarity and increase widespread acceptability for the biblical list as personality

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<sup>12</sup> Katie Fortune and Don Fortune, *Discover Your God-given Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen. 1987, revised 2009).

traits and functions.<sup>13</sup> Her teachings became popular interdenominationally and found roots during the 1990s.

Another significant proponent of using the Romans 12:6-8 list of gifts, calling them *redemptive gifts*, is researcher and conference speaker, Arthur Burk.<sup>14</sup> Through extensive cassette tape ministries, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, his teaching found widespread acceptance among Charismatic churches and ministries. Burke extended Fortune's understanding beyond individual personality temperaments, proposing that each church has one of the seven traits as its primary purpose, and, further, that each city and each country has one of these as their primary trait of operation and purpose for existence to the global community.

*Table 9. Design-Gifts' Spheres of Influence*

Each temperament exists in  
expanding spheres of  
influence:

- Individual
- Church
- City
- Nation

### **The Design-Gifts in Scripture**

In launching from these two platforms and road-testing them as a conference speaker in multiple countries, it became clear to me as an author, pastor, and college

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<sup>13</sup> Katie Fortune, personal interview with author when discussing her gifts test when she taught them at the church that I pastor. April 21, 1993, at Seattle City Foursquare Church.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Burk, Sapphire Leadership Group LLC, <https://theslg.com/content/arthur-burk>

teacher that the proper name for this list was not *motivational gifts*, but instead *design-gifts*.<sup>15</sup> This term change was used to highlight God's design in humans over and above what motivates a person. Since humans were created by God, he designed people, not motivated them.

A pattern developed while inspecting the design-gifts. The scripture from Romans 12:6-8 became home base for the study. Then, when overlaying this list of seven as seven identifiers over other lists of seven in the Bible, it became abundantly clear there was a recognizable and consistent pattern. This began with overlaying them first on the seven days of creation, providing exciting and astonishing results, confirming that indeed the design gift list was the key with which to unlock the Bible's treasure trove of personality descriptions. Following this discovery, the primary list of seven was laid over the seven churches found in Revelation 2-3. The consistencies carried, with even more and deeper revelations. Further experimentation ensued.

Next the design-gifts list was overlaid over the seven implements of the temple with the same results of perfect correlation. Then again over the seven-fold spirit of God from Isaiah 11:2, and finally over the seven-fold ministry of Jesus from Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 61:1-4. It appeared that the design gift list was not an isolated list, but was in fact the key to unlocking personality descriptions for humankind. These descriptions are threaded throughout scripture, from Genesis, through the prophets and gospels, into Revelation. The only parameter is to match sequentially each of the sevens with each of the sevens in the other passages. The first design gift, for example, would coincide with the first of the seven from the other lists of seven, and so on.

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas Heck, *Knowing Your Design Gift* (Seattle: Horizon, 2014), 6.

The results provide solid biblical explanations of personality traits, and not from just a single scripture but instead from multiple, adding dimension and enlightenment. The Bible does, indeed, address differences in human personality, and even provides vocabulary for naming these differences.

Comparing the lists of sevens went from a curious exercise to serious study upon discovery of the consistency. These patterns revealed highly significant qualities which open deep understanding to human identity. This, at last, was the biblical dimension which goes beyond psychological studies. This would be the theological starting point to naming identity, which would assist in creating a bridge for the millennials who were leaving the church, wondering why theology and the church was unable to answer questions regarding their emotions of shame and personal identity.

These personality descriptions emerge as a significant leap toward understanding human temperament as designed by God. It moves the study beyond the scope of field of observant psychology to plunging deep into the inner vocabulary of the Creator's heart. This significant find has now been road-tested in seminar format for over a decade to churches and colleges in multiple cultures and countries. It has become a keystone for self-identity not only for individuals, like the millennials, but for marriages, families, churches, and businesses.

To illustrate these correlations from the various lists-of-seven, the following table was created. This provides a useful page-at-a-glance format, which begins to describe the consistencies and correlations between these lists. This is the most helpful tool to begin understanding the design-gifts.



Table 10. Consistency of The Biblical Sevens and Their Alignment with the Design-Gifts

<b>Consistency of “Sevens” and Their Alignment with Design-Gifts</b>					
<b>Design Gifts</b> Romans 12:6-8	<b>1</b> <b>Days of Creation</b> Genesis 1-2	<b>2</b> <b>Temple Implements</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Jesus’ Mission</b> Luke 4:18-19 Isaiah 61:1-2	<b>4</b> <b>Sevenfold Spirit of God</b> Isaiah 11:2	<b>5</b> <b>The Churches</b> Revelation 2-3
<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Light</b> Revealing	<b>Brazen Altar</b> Sacrifice/surrender	<b>Spirit of the Lord God</b> Messenger	<b>Spirit of the Lord God</b> Representor	<b>Ephesus</b> Rev. 2:1-7
<b>Servant</b>	<b>Atmosphere</b> To support life	<b>Wash Laver</b> Cleansing	Bring good news the poor	<b>Spirit of Wisdom</b> Implementer	<b>Smyrna</b> Rev 2:8-11
<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Land &amp; Plants</b> Seeds reproducing	<b>Bread Table</b> Seed/food	Repair the broken hearted	<b>Spirit of Understanding</b> Impartation	<b>Pergamum</b> Rev. 2:12-17
<b>Exhorter</b>	<b>Sun- Moon-Stars</b> Discernment	<b>Lamp Stand</b> Fullness of light	Proclaim freedom to the captives	<b>Spirit of Counsel</b> Encourager	<b>Thyatira</b> Rev. 2:18-29
<b>Giver</b>	<b>Birds &amp; Fish</b> Multiplication	<b>Incense Altar</b> Intercession	Restoration of sight	<b>Spirit of Might</b> Investor/power	<b>Sardis</b> Rev. 3:1-6
<b>Ruler</b>	<b>Humans</b> Developers/ dominion	<b>Ark</b> Rod = authority Manna=provision Tablets=principle	Liberate the oppressed	<b>Spirit of Knowledge</b> Team synergy	<b>Philadelphia</b> Rev. 3:7-13
<b>Mercy</b>	<b>Rest</b> Reflection/ fulfillment	<b>Mercy Seat</b> God’s throne	Proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’s favor	<b>Spirit of the Fear of the Lord</b> Honor God	<b>Laodicea</b> Rev.3:14-22

It is most helpful to line up into columns five of the primary scriptural *lists-of-seven*, which then opens revelation for the existence of a design-gift theme in the Bible.

Each of these lists is keyed back to the Romans 12:6-8 list, the *design-gifts* (see left column on Table 10). Each column is sequential, top to bottom, beginning from one through seven, and each correlate to the sequence in the master column on the left. Then, for simplification of this overview chart, there are one- or two-word explanations. These will each be expanded in the pages ahead, moving in the sequence shown from columns left to right. The purpose of the chart is to show that biblical personality traits are not identified simply by a list of one-word terms, such as prophet, servant, teacher, exhorter, giver, ruler, and mercy, but rather that the traits of each of these are revealed in its counterpart in the other columns.

These lists afford an expanded understanding of human design. It also shows that completeness for humans is found in interrelation with other people who possess one of the other six temperaments. The fullness of the body of Christ can be best understood when there is a realization that Jesus is all seven of the traits simultaneously. The body of Christ then becomes full when you and the other six gifts interact in authentic and intimate community. This brings meaning to Apostle Peter's words: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."<sup>16</sup>

### *Design-Gifts as Seen in the Creation Story*

The foundational list of seven is found in the Genesis account of the seven days of creation. Like a carpenter building a house upon a solid foundation, each succeeding day God moved toward the completion of his creation, into which he would place humanity to dwell. By noticing the seven days of creation in sequence, and what it was that God

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Peter 4:10.

designed during each of the days, and then comparing this beside each of the gifts, one sees the foundational components of a complete human temperament. These seven days of creation correspond to the seven design-gifts in perfect sequence.

*Table 11. Comparing Design-Gifts to Days of Creation*

<b>Design-Gifts</b> Romans 12:6-8	<b>1 Days of Creation</b> Genesis 1-2
<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Light</b> Revealing
<b>Servant</b>	<b>Atmosphere</b> To support life
<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Land &amp; Plants</b> Seeds/ reproducing
<b>Exhorter</b>	<b>Sun- Moon- Stars</b> Discernment
<b>Giver</b>	<b>Birds &amp; Fish</b> Multiplication
<b>Ruler</b>	<b>Humans</b> Developers/ dominion
<b>Mercy</b>	<b>Rest</b> Reflection/ fulfillment

For example, on day one God created light, which corresponds to the *prophet* design-gift. That gift is designed to *reveal*, or illuminate by providing “light.” Prophet design-gift people are those who are passionate about seeing design or needing to know

how things fit together.<sup>17</sup> The illumination enhances discernment, even if what is discerned is chaos and confusion, as in the case of the first creation day. Prophet design-gift people tend to “call it out,” or speak what they see while taking little note of any emotional consequence to the listener. Not intending unkindness or rudeness, they bluntly state things as they see them. The prophet possesses an intuitive, God-given, understanding of his designs. This is helpful illumination. One could say that they see things more clearly, if starkly black or white, with few grays. With this gift, they are destined to be able to solve complex issues, and, working in combination with the other six gifts, equipped to subdue creation. One could say they are connected directly to God as creator, who is the light, functioning as messengers who illuminate God’s designs to the remainder of creation.

Day two, the *servant* design-gift, corresponds with day two of creation, the *atmosphere*. It is the air man breathes that supports life in him. In the same way, servant design-gift people are designed to support others by creating around them an appropriate environment. For example, in a church setting, it is the servant design-gift people who are most aware of the meeting environment, and are quick to implement necessary things, such as coffee, seating, heating, and visual aids. They are hard-wired to be aware of the atmosphere around them, and supply for others what is needed.

The third gift is the teacher-gift, and it corresponds with day three, where God created the dirt which sprouted vegetation, plants which produced seeds for more plants. These seeds, when sown, will produce another plant according to its own kind.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> Heck, *Knowing Your Design Gift*, 36.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:12.

characteristic of the teacher-gift seen here is a design for reproducing what is hidden in the heart of the teacher, finding good soil, or people, into which the teacher can plant seeds of truth which will grow and become fruitful.

On the fourth day God creates the sun, moon, and stars, correlating to the fourth design-gift, exhorter. The word exhorter means encourager, and the sun, moon, and stars are created to bring encouragement since they bring signs and seasons.<sup>19</sup> It is the seasons which give humans a pace for life, like summer and winter, and day and night. These create a rhythm. God also created these to show his extravagance and awesome grandeur, especially when one stares through the stars into space. Exhorter design-gift people love the extravagance of God, his “bling,” evident in this handiwork. To the community, exhorters spark encouragement and display the beauty of God and his creation.

Interestingly, on day five, God creates swarms of living creatures in the waters, and birds to fill the atmosphere. This day corresponds with the giver design-gift. Like the vegetation, each reproduces according to its own kind. In this instance, it is their bodily DNA, containing their unique genetic code, which is given to their offspring. The giver design-gift is designed for family and multiplication. They invest long-term, with an innate ability to discern a worthy place in which to invest. This provides for them resources with which they are willing to share with other worthy people. Seldom does a giver design-gift person give to the beggar on the street corner, because to them, they feel that beggar should attempt to labor and invest themselves in order to receive finances. Instead of the giver, it would be the mercy design-gift person who would give with less concern as to the worthiness of the recipient.

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<sup>19</sup> Genesis 1:14.

On day six, God creates humanity to bring rule and dominion to his creation, hence the name *ruler* design-gift. This temperament brings structure necessary for multiplication and fruitfulness. Ruler design-gift people display the hard-wired blessing to take dominion of creation through multiplication, fruitfulness, and, most importantly, problem-solving, or in other words, *subduing* the earth. This concept of subduing made human-kind different than the animals. God gave the first three blessings to the animals as well, to *be fruitful, fill, and multiply*, but not the fourth blessing to subdue.<sup>20</sup> Only humans were endowed with this fourth blessing, of subduing. To subdue means that humans have the knowledge and reasoning power to overcome conflicts and to solve difficult problems. Humanity has even overcome gravity and propelled themselves to the moon and back. Animals do not subdue, or reason out solutions to conflicts, but instead attack or flee.

Finally, on day seven God does not create anything new, but instead reflects upon his creation. This is a mercy for humanity, who now has time to reflect on accomplishments. Of this day God says of his creative work, not simply that it was good but “It is very good.”<sup>21</sup> Day seven corresponds to the *mercy* design-gift, who is the person who thrives on harmony, and everyone getting along. They are aware of how all the other gifts are functioning and seeks to merge them all into a community experiencing a sense of oneness. It is like building a complex system, and now it is functioning, fulfilling its purpose. This is the mercy-design gift person. They exist to live in the now, reflect, and offer “rest” to the other six gifts. This is like the home builder who not only

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 1:31.

erects the home, but once it is finished, moves into the house with exclamation similar to God's, saying "it is very good." This moment of completeness and reflection describes the mercy day, later known as the Sabbath day. Jesus even says of this Sabbath that it is a day made for man, not man made for the Sabbath.<sup>22</sup> By this Jesus is teaching that humanity is not to cease all labor in religious duty, but rather rhythmically pause, having subdued, and enjoy a time of reflection and giving honor to current existence.

### *Design-Gifts as Seen in the Temple Implements*

As the creation days are foundational in revealing characteristics of the human temperaments, next in expanding understanding are the seven implements used in Jewish Temple worship. Since Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit, then the seven-fold nature of the Spirit must be evident in these human temples, too.

The Jewish Temple is a model of heaven's throne room. When Moses was on the mountain conversing with God, he gained detailed "blueprints" for the tabernacle (the Temple's portable predecessor) he was instructed to make. Everything was to be according to the pattern shown him by God. Exactness of fulfilling the construction plans was required, since these plans were a copy of the worship center existing in heaven. It was as if God was describing to Moses his "living room" layout in order that it might be repeated at the center of his people on earth. It was to be God's dwelling place on earth:

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. *They serve a copy and*

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<sup>22</sup> Mark 2:27.

*shadow of the heavenly things.* For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”<sup>23</sup>

This scripture contains great significance to the study of human temperament since Jesus later establishes that his church is his body and is to be his dwelling place on earth.<sup>24</sup> This infers that within the church exists the full array of Jesus’ temperament, the heavenly man.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Temple implements become metaphors for images of great significance, reflecting the design of God’s dwelling. They are seen in the sequential order that the priest would move from station to station. The first was the altar of sacrifice, then the wash laver, the table of bread, the lamp, the incense alter and finally standing before the ark containing the mercy seat. Each of these positions carries significance for a fuller understanding of human temperament.

The first implement is the altar of sacrifice. It reveals images of the decisive and abrupt nature of prophet design-gift people. It is here at the altar that either life or death is determined and that propitiation for sin is made, restoring right relationship with God. This foreshadows God’s desire for intimacy with humanity and willingness to sacrifice Jesus to open the avenue for such a relationship. This sacrificial act is *prophetic* in that it brings to mind images of light coming to humans in the form of Jesus who would be The Light of the world, walking mankind out of the cave of darkness and shame. This is the Temple’s first and most visible station.

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<sup>23</sup> Hebrews 8:1-5. Emphasis mine.

<sup>24</sup> Colossians 1:18.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:49.



*Table 12. Comparing Design Elements to Temple Implements*

<b>Design Gifts</b> Romans 12:6-8	<b>2 Temple Implements</b>
<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Sacrifice Altar</b> Sacrifice
<b>Servant</b>	<b>Wash Laver</b> Cleansing
<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Bread Table</b> Seed/food
<b>Exhorter</b>	<b>Lamp Stand</b> Fullness of light
<b>Giver</b>	<b>Incense Altar</b> Intercession
<b>Ruler</b>	<b>Ark</b> Rod = authority Manna=provision Tablets=principles
<b>Mercy</b>	<b>Mercy Seat</b> God's throne

Secondly is the wash basin, where the priests would cleanse themselves before entering the holy place. This corresponds to the servant design-gift, whose job is to bring a fresh and clean atmosphere, as would a host at a formal dinner. In Japan, the hosts would bring an *oshibori*, or hot towel, for guests to cleanse their hands and face before eating. This created a clean and fresh atmosphere in preparation for what was next to come. The temperament of the servant design-gift is one who is aware of the practical

needs of those around them, and provides necessary accommodation. They provide this platform under others to enhance their journeys.

Third in sequence is the teacher design gift, which corresponds with the table of bread. The correlation is that the bread is made from grains, which were created on this day when God made the vegetation containing these seeds. This hints at a person with a temperament who loves words, like seeds, a metaphor which Jesus often used in parables and teachings.<sup>26</sup> When seeds are eaten, they produce life. Teachers are interested in the seeds of truth and transmitting them to bring life to Christ's body. Additionally, Jesus refers to himself as "the bread of life." He is the provision, like manna from heaven, which brings forth life.<sup>27</sup> As often as we eat, or partake of Jesus; life, we are nourished and reminded of his promise of eternal life. This semiotic image, now known in the church as communion, was first present in temple worship represented by the table of bread.

Fourth is the lampstand, or Menorah. This corresponds with the exhorter design-gift and also day four of creation, when God made the sun, moon, and stars. There is an obvious correlation between these created lights and the hand-made golden lampstand. Both the sun, moon, and stars along with the lampstand are created lighting, which is different than day one's revelatory lighting. This created light is a lesser type of light, and not a source light, as in the first day of creation. The sun, moon, and stars, illuminates the beauty and extravagance of God's previous creation, that of trees and vegetation. How this fits with the golden lampstand in the temple is that this a created light, and

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<sup>26</sup> Matthew 13:4; 13:34.

<sup>27</sup> John 6:35.

illuminates God's goodness in the inner sanctum of the temple called the holy place. In similar fashion, the exhorter design-gift person encourages by illuminating God's beauty and holiness, which in this case was all the beautiful and meaningful art inside of the Holy Place. Exhorters reflect God's glory. Like the glistening jewels like that a woman wears to highlight beauty, exhorter's focus others toward God's glistening goodness, thus bringing encouragement, which is the root meaning of the term exhorter.

The fifth implement, the incense altar, corresponds to the giver design-gift. At this station, the priest would routinely make intercessory prayers to God on behalf of the people. Here is introduced the idea of giving intercessory prayer in connection with one of the most precious gifts one could give. They stand in the gap between the needs of man and the supplier, God. They often stand between need and provision, using financial gifts to bring solution to financial needs. This role of intercession carries a fragrant incense which is pleasing to God. The giver is used by God to be able to secure provision and is entrusted with the stewardships to distribute it appropriately. Givers, being keenly interested in the broader family and community, tend to invest for the perpetuity of the next generation. They live to give an endowed inheritance. It is God who is often seen as the giver throughout the Bible. He is the one who gives to needs of his people as in the instance of providing manna in the wilderness, or even giving his only son as a sacrifice to provide atonement for humanity.

The sixth implement is the ark of the covenant, which corresponds with the ruler design-gift. To understand the correlation of *ruler* design-gift to the *ark*, one must open the ark and inspect its contents. Inside of the ark are three things: 1) the stone tablets of

the Ten Commandments; 2) the Jar of Manna; and 3) the Rod of Aaron.<sup>28</sup> This trio of images best describes the components inside the ruler design-gift person.

The first content of the ark of the covenant is the actual covenant, represented by the stone tablets. These are God's principles and laws. They formed a constitution of sorts, upon which a government could be founded in order to create a society suitable for the people's safety and prosperity. For any person who was qualified to bring ruling in controversy, the law formed the foundational framework for making decisions.

The second piece of the contents of the ark of the covenant is the jar of manna. This was a sample from the wilderness-wandering days of Israel, which remained to remind the people that God gave miraculous daily food. This represents God's provision. The ruler design-gift person is equipped with God-given discernment on how to bring sources of provision for a community. This could be manifest in starting businesses, securing income rentals, or basically creating systems by which there is a profit that can be then stewarded to provide for the food and shelter of the community. This entrepreneurial aspect reveals someone who thinks "big picture" in orderly, systematic ways, which are based upon a clearly delineated set of principles.

The final artifact inside of the ark of the covenant is Aaron's rod. This was his walking stick, which was required to be presented with the other tribal leaders' rods before God in a test to determine authority. Aaron's rod had budded, which was a sign that God endorsed his authority above the other tribal heads. The rod in the ark became a sign that design-gift people carries God's authority. The ruler design-gift person naturally tends to emerge as the one others recognize to make authoritative decisions. This trust is

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<sup>28</sup> Joshua 3:3.

bestowed due not only to divine gifting of authority, but also since the rulings that the ruler design-gift person makes are based upon the divine principles written by God on the tablets, also in ark. The ruler's decisions are based upon these known and accepted set of foundational principles. This authority, represented by the Rod of Aaron, gives the ruler the ability to help move the community forward, without stalling, which can often happen in a situation where there is no dominant authority and everyone's opinions hold equal value. God designed into the ruler design-gift person the three things of *authority*, based upon *principle*, and a desire to bring *provision* for the good of the community. This person often emerges as head of or part of the governing board of a group or community.

Finally, the seventh temple implement is the mercy seat, which smoothly links to the mercy design-gift person. The mercy seat is comprised of golden statues of two cherubim angels bowing down in such a way that their sets of wings touch each other's wings and thereby form the seat for God's presence. This last temple station in the priest's journey is the highest station in temple worship, where there are face-to-face encounters with merciful God. The mercy design-gift is different than the previous six. Rather than being yet another component, it helps the previous six function in harmony. This gift brings completion to the first six gifts, forming genuine community. At creation, nothing was created on the seventh day, but instead there is rest for the purpose of refectation and enjoyment of all that was previously made. This placement of the mercy seat upon the ruler ark reveals that the mercy design-gift person is the one who connects the presence of God to the body of Christ. This is the one who would be most apt to sense the presence of God in a church meeting or gathering. This heightened sense of awareness makes this person extraordinarily "present" in the moment.

Linking mercy together with ruler (ark) as a unit gives a clue to the needed interrelationship between the two. A ruler design-gift person not linked to a mercy design-gift person can easily become autocratic and overly principled. Their strength is tempered with mercy, since attempting to comply to the letter of the law brings death, not life.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, mercy design-gift people unlinked to ruler design-gift people become vulnerable to emotional and unprincipled responses. Mercy alone would cheapen the whole structure and have an adverse effect on the community. It is the harmonious connection of mercy with principles that releases joy and order.

With these seven temple implements, an image comes into focus of the complete body of Christ, or the church, with each of the seven temperaments functioning in their design-gifts to sustain the rest. When members of the church can identify one another, tolerance grows for differences. The handles afforded through these design-gifts assist in that task of identification. No longer does one feel they are “not normal” when they can embrace who they are and realize that being like one another is not the goal. Instead, the goal is that each one learn to appreciate, respect, and honor one another. In this act, then, the body becomes whole and coordinated.

#### *Design-Gifts as Seen in Jesus’ Mission Statement*

The third column in the chart is helpful to understand that Jesus’ seven-fold mission on earth reveals characteristics of the seven design-gifts. This mission statement is prophesied by Isaiah, and then claimed by Jesus when he inaugurated his public

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<sup>29</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6.

ministry when he stood and read Isaiah's prophecy of his mission at the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor;  
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.<sup>30</sup>

It is in combining both the Isaiah prophecy and the version which Jesus quotes in Luke that all seven aspects of the mission are included. For Isaiah includes "repairing the broken-hearted," which Luke does not, and Luke includes "the restoration of sight to the blind," which Isaiah does not. Adding both passages together gives the seven which qualify Jesus' mission statement as a key passage that reveals the seven personalities.

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<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19.

*Table 13. Comparing Design-Gifts to Jesus' Mission Statement*

<b>Design-Gifts</b> Romans 12:6-8	<b>3 Jesus' Ministry</b> Luke 4:18-19 Isaiah 61:1-2
<b>Prophet</b>	Spirit of the Lord God (As Messenger)
<b>Servant</b>	Bring good news the poor
<b>Teacher</b>	Repair the broken-hearted
<b>Exhorter</b>	Proclaim freedom to the captives
<b>Giver</b>	Restoration of sight
<b>Ruler</b>	Liberate the oppressed
<b>Mercy</b>	Proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord's favor

Jesus begins his mission statement with declaring that he is anointed with the spirit of the Lord. This anointing is confession that God's breath is upon him to function as God's agent on earth. This links to the design gift of *prophet*, which reveals that prophet design-gift people have an "intuitive" perspective, a prophetic representation of God's heart and anointing on earth. Also, prophet design-gift people seem to know only one way to do things, and therefore are very decisive. This reflects intuitive monotheism, since there exists only one Lord, and then logically only one way of seeing and functioning.

The second aspect of Jesus' mission statement links the servant design-gift with "bringing good news to the poor." Jesus was often seen interacting with the common



people, the poor, the sick, and those needing to hear good news. This reveals again that the servant design-gift person is aware of the needs of those around them and lifts the atmosphere with the good news of acts of service. In Jesus' case, these were healing, provision, and eternal life, rather than sickness, starvation, legalism, and hopelessness.

Thirdly, Jesus reveals that he “repairs the broken-hearted,” which links with the teacher design gift. It is the teacher who brings revelation of hope and future, a higher level of thinking. The characteristic of the teacher gifts seen through this grid is that of bringing truth that heals and sets one free. This requires interactions with the other gifts, and this is the person who the hurting approach, seeking consolation. Teachers repair the emotions of others, like Jesus, whose third mission was repairing the broken-hearted.

Fourthly, Jesus came to proclaim freedom to the captives. This correlates with the fourth design-gift, exhorter, in that exhorters are proclaimers of encouragement, especially to those who feel hopelessly captive. The characteristic revealed in Jesus' mission is the person who seeks out captives to bring them hope.

The fifth part of Jesus' mission statement is the restoration of sight to those who cannot see. Correlating with the fifth design-gift of giver, this reveals the giver to be the one who is passionate about assisting so others can see clearly and function on their own. This “blind” person is given insight in the manner of a fresh perspective to make future provision for themselves. The giver is one who invests into others, especially those, like younger children, who do not yet see future possibilities and avenues of income. This role is intercessory, like in the previous example of the priest who intercedes at the altar of incense.

The sixth part of Jesus' mission statement goes beyond the restoration of sight and moves to action, that of liberating the oppressed. The oppressed might represent, for instance, people who are under tyranny, or legalism to the extent of despair. This correlates to the ruler design-gift person, who sets principles, provision, and authority in place to provide a system and government which is liberating to the oppressed people. By this, we see again that the ruler design-gift person is one who operates for the good of the whole community by setting in order a self-sustaining, peaceful community. This would include potential conflict resolution intuitions, which are hard-wired to interpret behaviors against the grid of the community principles and values. The ruler design-gift person looks for problems to solve in order for a smoothly functioning society.

The seventh and final aspect of Jesus' mission statement is to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord's favor. This is in reference to the time of peace where all conflicts are resolved and there is a peaceful existence. This correlates to the mercy design-gift, which is the harmonious flow of life and spirit between all the parts of a community. The word acceptable is key to help understand a dimension of the characteristics of the mercy design-gift in that they would be accepting and far less critical of people's shortcomings. When things are out of order, like even the way a person organizes their desk or living space, it tends to upset the harmony which is the goal and restful place for the mercy design-gift person.

Therefore, by observing the mission statement of Jesus, one can see that an even fuller understanding of the characteristics of the seven types of people becomes evident. Since Jesus is the fullness of all in all (Ephesians 1:22), then Jesus actually is not one, but

the harmony of all seven of the gifts, and his mission is to see that his church's mission also contains all of them.<sup>31</sup>

*Design-Gifts as Seen in the Sevenfold Spirit of God*

The biblical term sevenfold, used nine times in the English Standard Version, refers to seven parts of a thing. The spirit of God is one seen as having seven parts. In the Apostle John's letter Revelation, a victorious Jesus is described as a lamb having "seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God."<sup>32</sup> The quest to gain understanding as to the meaning of this sevenfold spirit of God came with much musing, yet understanding emerged by laying this list under the seven design-gifts.

Since Jesus as the second Adam is the complete human, he possesses the fullness of all the human temperaments in their most mature form.<sup>33</sup> Then it flows that Jesus' sevenfold spirit is the sevenfold temperaments. Isaiah prophetically assigns descriptive qualities to the seven spirits that would rest upon Jesus, the expected Messiah:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.  
And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Colossians 1:19, 2:9.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 5:6.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:45.

<sup>34</sup> Isaiah 11:1-2.

Table 14. Comparing Design-Gifts to the Seven-Fold Spirit of God

<b>Design Gifts</b> Romans 12:6-8	<b>4 Sevenfold Spirit of God</b> Isaiah 11:2
<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Spirit of the Lord God</b> Representor
<b>Servant</b>	<b>Spirit of Wisdom</b> Implementer
<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Spirit of Understanding</b> Imparter
<b>Exhorter</b>	<b>Spirit of Counsel</b> Encourager
<b>Giver</b>	<b>Spirit of Might</b> Investor/power
<b>Ruler</b>	<b>Spirit of Knowledge</b> Team synergy
<b>Mercy</b>	<b>Spirit of the Fear of the Lord</b> Honor God

By taking this list of seven spirits and laying them under the sevenfold design-gifts, not only does it fit, but it brings enhanced understanding to the characteristics. For example, the first temperament is prophet, which by comparison aligns with Lordship. This reveals a temperament of exactness, illuminated truths, and non-negotiables, much like the obedience expected by a Lord. This is the temperament of someone who sees things in black and white, with no grays. To this person there is only one Lord, and he rules supreme, full of veracity and exactness.

The second of the sevenfold spirit of God is the spirit of *wisdom*. This characteristic aligns with servant and reveals the characteristic of servant design-gift

people as possessing wisdom, or the ability to know how to implement knowledge. This requires a posture of action and movement. Wisdom, as opposed to simply knowledge, requires implementation. Thus, the servant design-gift person is the temperament of action, especially evident in a communal setting.

The third in the list of the sevenfold spirits of Jesus is the spirit of understanding. This reveals the characteristic of the teacher-gift beautifully. The teacher craves understanding, a level much deeper than knowledge. Understanding is not simply knowing the what, but also knowing the why. This is a major characteristic of the teacher. Once understanding is gained, sharing it with others becomes a deep motivation, hence the term *teacher*.

The fourth in the list of the sevenfold spirits of Jesus is the spirit of *counsel*. This correlates to the exhorter design-gift, whose motivation is to encourage and restore people captivated in despairing mindsets. A key characteristic of the exhorter design-gift person is giving counsel and exhortation in order to see people be illuminated by God's goodness. This temperament makes good counselors, who lovingly listen to and interact with people, especially if they are hurting and could use encouragement.

The fifth of the sevenfold spirits of Jesus is spirit of *might*. At first, this one was not so easy to discern, but in light of the other lists it became abundantly apparent. The *spirit of might* is the restoration of helplessness, especially if one was restored from blindness, as seen previously. The giver is driven to empower other people by investing into them in such a way that they could become self-empowered. For the giver design-gift person, this would be good stewardship and a satisfactory investment and a deep source of motivation, bringing the fulfillment of their purpose.

The sixth in the list of Jesus' sevenfold spirit is the spirit of *knowledge*. This correlates with the ruler design-gift person, who is the person who possesses a bank of knowledge, or, as termed previously, principles. From the ark example, we observed the laws of God symbolized. This was specific knowledge that a ruler in Israel would need to possess a working knowledge of in order to bring rulings. Ruler design-gift people have the intellectual acumen to grasp necessary knowledge for bringing a group's systems and government online. Far more than memorizing principles, it is applicable knowledge used for people management, conflict resolution, and construction of societies.

Finally, the list of the sevenfold spirit of Jesus ends with "the spirit of the fear of the Lord," which clearly correlates with the *mercy* design-gift. The fear of the Lord is a phrase which means to revere, respect, or honor the Lord. The seventh day of creation is the Lord's Day, where Israel was commanded in the fourth of the Ten Commandments to honor the Lord's Day by keeping it holy, or consecrated, to him.<sup>35</sup> This aligns with *the fear of the Lord*, or honoring God. The characteristic of the mercy temperament is to honor God personally, face to face, as seen in the temple implements, and to interact and reflect with God, as seen on the seventh day of creation.

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<sup>35</sup> Exodus 20:8.

*Design-Gifts as Seen in the Seven Churches of Revelation*

The fullest descriptions of human personalities are seen in the Seven Churches of Revelation. Jesus personally addresses each one using a consistent four-part pattern: revelation, affirmation, warning, and destiny.

*Table 15. Pattern of Jesus' Speech to Churches*

<b>Pattern of Jesus' speech to each church:</b>	
1.	<b>Revelation:</b> Jesus reveals a different image of himself to each church
2.	<b>Affirmation:</b> Jesus affirms each
3.	<b>Warning:</b> Jesus warns each
4.	<b>Destiny:</b> Jesus declares the destiny of each church should they overcome

First, he reveals himself differently to each one. Second, he gives each church a unique affirmation, which reveals their unique personality. Third, Jesus brings warning, which reveals where they are prone to weakness (with the exception of the church of Philadelphia). Fourth, he declares a destiny when that church overcomes and matures into its full destiny and purpose. For illustration purposes, Table 16 brings these four patterns together with a summary of Jesus' comments to each.

Table 16. Illumination in Four Categories from the Seven Churches of Revelation

Gift	Church	Jesus reveals himself as:	Affirmation	Warning	Destiny
<b>Prophet</b>	Ephesus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who holds the 7 stars <i>Messengers</i></li> <li>walks midst the 7 lamps <i>Illumination</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not tolerate evil <i>Persevered.</i></li> <li>Hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans</li> </ul>	<p>Left her first love.</p> <p><i>In search of truth, they neglected love</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To eat from the tree of life in Paradise <i>Partake of life in God's place</i></li> </ul>
<b>Servant</b>	Smyrna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who was dead and came to life <i>Life-giving</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I know your works.</li> <li>Perseverance under persecution &amp; hardship</li> </ul>	Do not fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shall not be hurt by second death <i>Reward of eternal life</i></li> </ul>
<b>Teacher</b>	Pergamum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who has the sharp two-edged sword <i>Truth</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You hold fast to my name</li> <li>Do not deny My faith even in face of martyrdom <i>Sacrificial</i></li> </ul>	<p>Must Purge false doctrines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doctrine of Balaam</li> <li>Nicolaitanism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given hidden manna <i>Hidden revelation</i></li> <li>Chosen with a new name</li> </ul>
<b>Exhorter</b>	Thyatira	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whose eyes flame of fire <i>Purity-glory discernment</i></li> <li>searches minds /hearts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognized increasing works, love, service, faith &amp; patience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tolerated Jezebel's seductions, teaching immorality and idolatry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given power over nations <i>Vast influence</i></li> </ul>
<b>Giver</b>	Sardis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who has the 7 Spirits of God <i>Fullness</i></li> <li>7 stars = <i>Messengers</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A few remained undefiled. <i>Some good stewardship</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen the things that remain <i>Incomplete tasks</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clothed in white <i>Purity</i></li> <li>Reputation in Heaven</li> </ul>
<b>Ruler</b>	Philadelphia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is Holy, who is true <i>Set apart</i></li> <li>David's keys <i>King/prophet /priest</i></li> <li>open doors <i>Authority</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>kept Jesus' word -not denied him <i>principled</i></li> <li>False religions will submit to you <i>Vindicated</i></li> </ul>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You will be made a pillar in my Temple <i>Support the government of the church</i></li> <li>Authority in new Jerusalem</li> </ul>
<b>Mercy</b>	Laodicea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As the beginning of the creation of God</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are loved by me</li> </ul>	<p>Lukewarm.</p> <p><i>Their contentment is in natural things - Seek Jesus for true wealth.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dine with him <i>Intimacy</i></li> <li>Seated with Jesus on his throne</li> </ul>



Pausing to form this evidence into a chart (Table 16) forms a tapestry which weaves together the uniqueness of each of the seven churches, revealing the temperament characteristics of the design-gifts. The four horizontal columns describe Jesus' revelation, affirmation, warning, and declaration of destiny for each of the seven churches, which are listed in rows vertically. Creating this chart allows a valuable perspective which yields a treasure trove of temperament descriptions and interactions.

This becomes overwhelmingly convincing evidence supporting the theory that the design-gifts list of Romans 12:6-8 was indeed the biblical foundation naming human personality. Drilling down into this chart, this passage serves as the strongest single scriptural location describing human personality. This discovery is tremendously helpful in bringing in vocabulary for conversational use. Giving this tool to millennials provides a practical handle for self-discovery and serves a secondary purpose for them to more fully understand Jesus and his church. An explanation of each is necessary to get the clearest handle on each of the seven identities.

**Ephesus – Prophet Design-Gift.** First, always, is the prophet design-gift, which is exemplified by the Church of Ephesus, the primary church in the cluster of seven churches. This church was John's apostolic home base, from which he oversaw the remaining churches.<sup>36</sup>

Jesus reveals himself here as the one who holds the seven stars, which is a metaphor for the messengers, or pastors, as interpreted by Jesus himself.<sup>37</sup> A link is found between prophet and the messengers, or pastors, of each church. These are the individuals

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<sup>36</sup> John Foxe, *Foxes Book of Martyrs* (Alachua, FL: Bride Logos, 2001), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Revelation 1:20.

through whom God relays design and assignments for each church. It reveals a character of decisiveness, since any messages from God are to be simply accepted, and not debated.

The second of the four columns is affirmation. Jesus' affirmation to Ephesus is that they do not tolerate evil or false apostles and that they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. This reveals a temperament of intolerance for false and twisted ideas, thus aligning with the prophet design-gift. The third category is the warning from Jesus. For the Ephesians, they came to the point while in search of accuracy they lost their first love and passion. Being correct became more important than being loving. This reveals a tendency toward passionate starts which then fade in time.

Finally, Jesus reveals their destiny. For the Ephesians, any who conquer these weaknesses would be granted to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.<sup>38</sup> The destiny for prophet design-gift people is one and the same with the original design for human kind, which was that Adam and Eve would eat of the tree of life, live forever, and dwell with God as their Lord in paradise. This broader human destiny pulls together each of the previously discussed *lists of seven* describing the prophet: Humanity was designed to live in God's presence.

**Smyrna – Servant Design-Gift.** The second church of Smyrna correlates to the servant design-gift. To this church, Jesus reveals himself as the resurrected, life-giving one. How this links to the servant design-gift is that their design is to build platforms for success under others, helping and serving them to be able to move higher in their callings. They bring life to others, like the atmosphere (air) from creation day two. The

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<sup>38</sup> Revelation 2:7.

affirmation for Smyrna is that they are persevering and hardworking, even during difficulty, which describes the servant design-gift person who thrives on persevering labor.

The warning for Smyrna is to not fear. This was a glaring problem, since they were experiencing slander and horrific persecution from Rome.<sup>39</sup> Jesus warns of tribulation to come, and that if they are faithful, even unto death, then their destiny would be to receive the crown of eternal life. The words “crown from Jesus” are encouraging in that the servant is usually the opposite of royalty, but in the life after death they would possess the equivalent of a crown. This fits, since servants lay down their lives in order that others might progress. Servants require reminding of the “big picture” in order to regain motivation and understanding for the tasks they undertake. This is why Jesus gives them this hope and helps them see the promised reward of eternal life.

**Pergamum – Teacher Design-Gift.** The third church is Pergamum, which links to the teacher design-gift. Jesus reveals himself to this church as the one who has words like a sharp two-edged sword. This links beautifully with teachers, who are keenly interested in words and using them concisely like a sharp sword. In other places as well, the Bible describes words using the metaphor of a sharp two-edged sword.<sup>40</sup> The weapon of the teacher is words, which are used to slice away clutter from ideas which have been entangled and confused. Teacher design-gift people are interested in slices of truth and in untwisting ideas which have been mixed with other, unrelated ideas. In fact, the word iniquity, often used in the Old Testament, has as its root meaning the idea of something

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<sup>39</sup> Revelation 2:9-10.

<sup>40</sup> Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16. Jesus is described as having a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth.

twisted.<sup>41</sup> This would mean that *iniquity* is the twisting of truth until it is unrecognizable. Words used like a sharp sword, then, bring the image of slicing away error and leaving the true.

The teacher design-gift passion for truth is confirmed by observing the affirmation Jesus gives to Pergamum. He notes that they did not deny their faith, even in the face of persecution. Their warning, however, reveals that the job is not finished. There remains the unchallenged false teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.<sup>42</sup> The fact Jesus mentions very specific false teachings reveals that their destiny is to uncover and correct specific heresies in the church. Their reward for doing so is that they would receive hidden manna, a metaphor for hidden revelation, or mysteries revealed, the very passion of a teacher. The manna, being the bread given from heaven, relates again to the temple implement of bread, and also to the creation of plants with seeds in them. These metaphors help identify the traits of the teacher design-gift.

**Thyatira – Exhorter Design-Gift.** The fourth church is Thyatira, which links to the fourth design gift, exhorter. Jesus reveals himself to this church as the one whose eyes are a flaming fire and whose feet are burnished bronze. This image displays Jesus’ glory, shining brightly to illuminate and encourage all who are around them. This links to the trait of exhorters, who glisten with the encouragement of others and who display the glory of God for all to see. The phrase “eyes of flaming fire” brings to mind day four of

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<sup>41</sup> Exodus 20:5 contains word *iniquity* which is defined as a crook; literally or figuratively: do amiss, bow down, make crooked, commit iniquity, pervert, by James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (n.p.: Abingdon Press, 1890).

<sup>42</sup> Revelation 2:14-15. See Numbers 22 for the story of Balaam’s error.

creation, where the sun, moon, and stars were created to bring light by day and night, and also to brilliantly display the glory of God.

In Jesus' affirmation to Thyatira, he highlights, in exhorter fashion, five positive things. He affirms their ever-increasing works, their love, their faith, their service, and their patient endurance. These are an outflow of their design temperament, revealing that the exhorter is diligent, loving, and willing to serve. They are faith-filled. This temperament is clearly very social and interactive with other people.

Jesus' warning, however, reveals the weakness of this bombastic outward expression. He warns that they have tolerated Jezebel's seductions. Jezebel was more than a single historical figure; scripture also uses this name as a metaphor for a person who uses sexual seductions to manipulate and usurp authority.<sup>43</sup> Jesus warns the church at Thyatira to repent from following her teachings and seductions. Jezebel is used of a person who attempts to entice weak people into a heresy. This links with the exhorter design-gift, whose passion is to have everyone get along, be encouraged, and display God's goodness, but can cross over into unrighteous compromise and even error, using manipulative words to gain unmerited personal advancement. It is false authority gained through intrigue, seduction, and manipulation, and Jesus condemns this.

Finally, Jesus' word of destiny for Thyatira is that the people who overcome, not falling into Jezebel's trap, would receive righteous authority over nations. From this, one observes that exhorters are destined for vast influence and authority, but have the

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<sup>43</sup> 1 Kings 18:4 in Queen Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, who massacred God's prophets; Matthew 14:1-12 in Queen Herodias who manipulated the death of John the Baptist through sexual intrigue.

potential toward self-servingly flattering others, using carnal manipulations to shortcut the path to authority.

**Sardis – Giver Design-Gift.** The fifth church is Sardis, which links with the giver design-gift. To these people, Jesus reveals himself as the one who has the seven spirits, using a metaphor to describe the fullness (sevens) of his multi-variegated temperaments. Each one of these seven personalities shines through each of the corresponding seven stars, or messenger-pastors, to each of the seven churches. This indicates that Jesus is revealing himself to Sardis differently in that he is not particular, but instead inclusive of the collective whole. The giver design-gift, then, is a gift which is for the use of the entire body of Christ. It is more chameleon in that the temperament is not a singular color, but changes according to its surroundings. This makes it difficult to quickly identify. More data is needed.

Focus is gained through observation of the next sections of affirmation, warning, and destiny. Sardis was warned that they have a reputation of being alive, but are instead dead. They must wake up and finish their incomplete works and also strengthen what remains and is about to die. This reveals a temperament of starting well and with brilliance, but not following through to completion. This weakness causes them to look good on the outside, even to the place of gaining a strong reputation, but they can actually be “dead” on the inside. Again the chameleon, whose heart does not always match his color.

Jesus’ affirmation to Sardis is that they still have a few people who have not soiled their garments. These are the ones who have not compromised like the ones who have dirtied their “white garments” with irreputable practices. To the giver design-gift

person, reputation is important, as is the outward appearance of success. This is often accomplished by financial wealth and looking prosperous from monetary investments. While investments might pay handsomely at the beginning of their cycles, long-term stability is achieved by completing the cycle through vigilance and perseverance. The giver is one who is designed to step back, look at the long-term investment value of projects, and implement them. In addition, people in general and their family in particular are their central motivation, so they might earn and possess a good reputation among them. It is wired into their temperament. Jesus says that their destiny is to instead possess a good reputation in heaven—a thing deeply motivating to them.

**Philadelphia – Ruler Design-Gift.** The sixth is the church in Philadelphia, which correlates to the ruler design-gift. To these, Jesus reveals himself as one having great authority. This is seen in the metaphors chosen by Jesus describing himself as the one who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.<sup>44</sup>

These images are of specific authority, the type which possesses a key that can unlock and open certain doors. But beyond the key metaphor, Jesus refers to himself as the holy one and the true one. This holiness distinguishes him, as this word refers to being set apart or consecrated. The ruler design-gift person is one who is set apart for the task of unlocking opportunities for other to walk into.

The affirmation to the Philadelphia church is that they are principled people who have kept Jesus' word and not denied his name. This was done amidst the Roman persecution of the church. These people held to their values and principles, even at risk of

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<sup>44</sup> Revelation 3:7.

their lives. Jesus promises them vindication before the Jews who lie, who say they are Jews but are actually of the synagogue of Satan. These Jews will realize that the Christians in Philadelphia were genuine and actually loved by Jesus since they keep the word of patient endurance.<sup>45</sup>

The characteristic that becomes evident from this is that the ruler design-gift is set apart as steward of the mysteries of God for the sake of the others.<sup>46</sup> They will make the rulings as to the truth of God's ways, and with perseverance will withstand all opposition. There is a sense of having a battle-tested character which thereby possesses the authority to open doors for the others to move into their personal destinies. This gift serves to assist all others toward fulfilling and completing their destinies. They become pillars in the temple of God, or church, which hold up the covering, a metaphor referring to the government cover over the church.

**Laodicea – Mercy Design-Gift.** Finally, the seventh church, Laodicea, correlates to the mercy design-gift. To these people, Jesus reveals himself as the “Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.”<sup>47</sup> The “Amen” here and the mention of creation's origins are used as metaphors, bringing up the image of the seventh day of creation, the day of rest when God paused and reflected upon his handiwork from the previous six days. The word *amen* when used at the beginning of a certain discourse means “surely, truly, of a truth.”<sup>48</sup> Jesus reveals himself as the Lord of Sabbath—the

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<sup>45</sup> Revelation 3:10.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:1-2.

<sup>47</sup> Revelation 3:14.

<sup>48</sup> Strong's Greek Word Studies: ἀμήν amēn; of Hebrew origin (h543); properly, firm.



Lord of rest and reflection. This correlates to the mercy design-gift person, whose temperament is like this “harmonious day” when all other gifts are in place and functioning well. It is a day where God says of his creation, “It is very good.”<sup>49</sup> Jesus reflects again as the faithful and true witness speaking truth about his creation, the church.

Jesus brings warning to Laodicea that they are neither hot nor cold in their faith, but instead are lukewarm. In their peace and prosperity, they believe they are wealthy and lack nothing, not realizing that they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. This reveals the mercy design-gift characteristic of complacency while enjoying their leisurely life, that they did not even notice that they were not wealthy in the things that matter most to Jesus. There is a slackness that caused a cooling off of their faith, and they did not realize it. The mercy design-gift person might easily compromise for the sake of harmony, and not realize they have “cooled off.”

Jesus counsels this church to buy from him gold refined by fire. This is an invitation to find true wealth and purity through the heat of fiery trials. This reveals the tendency to avoid these trials. Most revealing of Jesus’ words to these people is when he counsels them to buy white garments so that they may clothe themselves and the shame of their nakedness may not be seen. There is a sense here that reputation is vital, and that on the outside they looked fine, but that it was a false cover for shame. The true cover would be the “white garments” they were encouraged to acquire. They could not see their pitiful state and were admonished to repent that they may discern the true and overcome into their destiny.

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<sup>49</sup> Genesis 1:31.

Jesus offers to sit and dine with them, a powerful and beautiful thing. However, he is left standing outside knocking at the door, awaiting their hospitality. Jesus was standing at the door of their hearts desiring entrance, but was not acknowledged. This reveals the slowness for making decisions and responding. Decisiveness is more difficult for the mercy design-gift person, especially compared to a ruler or prophet design-gift person. This can be a serious weakness.

The strength, however, of the mercy design-gift person is that they are the very seat of the presence of God in the church, like the image of the mercy seat in the Temple. This is the connecting point, which shows that mercy design-gift people can locate the presence of God most quickly, since it is their destiny.

### **Conclusion: Human Identity Revealed by Design-Gifts**

The purpose of this brief journey through the design-gifts study is to begin to construct a biblical foundation and vocabulary for identifying the human personality. In the quest for personal identity, vocabulary becomes a handle for conversations with others. It is other people who know us best who can assist us in self-discovery—this through dialogue and walking together. Shame issues can fade in the light of awareness of who God designed us to be. This can help answer millennials' question of "who am I?"

By studying all seven gifts as whole, it is easier to distinguish their variances. In this method of study, each gift's strengths and weaknesses become more apparent, as does how they might complement and augment one another in a community setting.

Many people ask the question, "Am I normal?" There is a common fear that one's thought patterns and life responses are abnormal, and the result is shame and hiding. It is

this shame and sense of isolation which begins to fade in the brilliant light of the all-important revelation: “I was designed the way I am.” Each person is normal when they settle into an understanding of their personal identity. Providing handles for this journey becomes quite valuable.

As personal identity clarifies, then self-worth dramatically increases, especially when they discover the community to which they belong. Each gift is vitally important for the body of Christ to function in its completeness, which is the sevenfold fullness of Jesus. There is a *full measure* of Jesus’ stature as a goal for the church, referred to in Ephesians 4:12-13: “building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Could this “full measure” be the complete sevenfold design-gifts functioning in unity in a community? It must certainly be.

Completeness is the goal, and each person coming into their destiny brings this. Paul’s goal in preaching was to bring every person into completion according to the design of Jesus: “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

Paul’s stewardship of the gospel propelled him to make fully known God’s word and especially its hidden mysteries, the main mystery being “Christ in you,” which brings hope of moving fully toward one’s destiny.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, since Jesus is in us, it is his sevenfold spirit which dwells in us. Each of us has access to the complete seven-sevenths of Jesus, but in the Church we each function dominantly with our single design gift as

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<sup>50</sup> Colossians 1:28 (NASB).

<sup>51</sup> Colossians 1:27.

one part of the whole body of Christ. Thus, church members are required to need one another and function together as a coordinated body.<sup>52</sup>

This brings millennials' two big questions back into view. The first question is "Who am I?" which has set them on a course seeking to know their personal identity. But finding this only leads them to ask their second vital question, "Where do I belong?" This need drives millennials in search of an authentic community.

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<sup>52</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-14.

## CHAPTER 5:

## BELONGING

**Belonging is a Primary Biblical Theme**

The millennials leaving church is not a cry for independence, but instead a search for a different type of community to belong to. They want something different than what they are experiencing in church, which then sets them on a quest for a new structure—a place where they can experience unconstrained freedom to discover who they are. Yet their need for belonging remains. It is a deep drive, hardwired into all humans by the Designer, who recognized this foundational need at creation, saying, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”<sup>1</sup> God saw that connection to another person would complete an unfulfilled hollowness inside of Adam. Since Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, they possessed the same drive for fellowship as God, the Trinity, who functions in a perichoresis, or circle dance, as Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Adam also needed a “dance” companion with whom to live and interact.<sup>2</sup>

The percentage of Americans who report chronic feelings of loneliness has risen over the past few decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, the percentages ranged between eleven and twenty percent (the percentage varied depending on the study), but by 2010, it was closer to 40 to 45 percent.<sup>3</sup> According to statistics from the General Social Survey

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:18.

<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications. 2015), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Entis, “Chronic Loneliness Is a Modern-Day Epidemic: An Interview with Dr. John Cacioppo,” *Fortune Magazine*, June 22, 2016, <http://fortune.com/2016/06/22/loneliness-is-a-modern-day-epidemic/>

(GSS), the number of Americans who say they have no close friends tripled between 1985 and 2004.<sup>4</sup> But is this dramatic two-decade tripling of *loneliness* a wide-scale societal dynamic, or is it occurring primarily among the millennial generation?

To answer this, it is important to be reminded that the millennials are emerging as the largest adult population. This leads to a conclusion that since they are or soon will be the predominant adult demographic, that it fits that loneliness is a problem increasing primarily among millennials. According to population projections by the U.S. Census Bureau, as of July 1, 2016,<sup>5</sup> millennials numbered 71 million, contrasted to the baby boomers, who numbered 74 million. However, there is approaching the cross-over point where these millennials (1984-1998), will emerge as the largest adult population, surpassing the population of the current largest living generation, the baby boomers (1946 to 1964). They are expected to overtake boomers in 2019 as they swell to 73 million and boomers decline to 72 million.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, since the largest group of adults will soon be millennials, and since *loneliness* has tripled, is it not a fair conclusion that a large amount of millennials are experiencing loneliness?

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<sup>4</sup> Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks Over Two Decades," *Sage Journals* (June 1, 2006), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/000312240607100301>

<sup>5</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Population Projections 2017," Accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popproj/data/datasets.html>

<sup>6</sup> Richard Fry, "Millennials Projected to Overtake Baby Boomers as America's Largest Generation," Pew Research Center, March 1, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>

## What is Loneliness?

Understanding the dynamics of loneliness and human interaction with belonging to a perceived authentic community can provide clues for possible re-incorporation of millennials. What are these dynamics of loneliness?

Loneliness, as described by John Cacioppo, the director of the University of Chicago's Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience, is "a perceived social isolation, or the discrepancy between what you want from your social relationships and your perception of those relationships."<sup>7</sup> Loneliness, since it is a perception and not simply an absence of interactive people, can occur even in the context of community. Perceptions cause us to react emotionally, even when these perceptions are not necessarily fact. The following is an example of how perceptions are often simple reflections of our emotions, and not always the actual facts.

Supposing someone is driving on the freeway, speeding past the 60 mph limit, happy and content. Suddenly, a blue light flashes into the mirrors, indicating that a patrolman wants the car pulled over. What is the common emotional response to this? The anger of the driver rises, along with their anxiety over being caught speeding, the reality of a pending traffic violation, and the public shame of being the one who is stopped on the freeway shoulder with a police car flashing lights behind you. These are all negative emotions: anxiety, shame, and regret. Then, suddenly, as this driver is pulling the vehicle to the side to receive their just punishment, the police officer speeds around in

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<sup>7</sup> Laura Entis, "Chronic Loneliness Is a Modern-Day Epidemic: An Interview with Dr. John Cacioppo," *Fortune Magazine*, June 22, 2016, <http://fortune.com/2016/06/22/loneliness-is-a-modern-day-epidemic/>

pursuit of the car and driver ahead. Now what are the emotional responses? Usually relief and shouts of gratitude for receiving grace. The truth is different than the perception. The fact is that this police officer was always pursuing the lead car. Though the facts did not change, when the perception of reality changed, so did the emotions.

So perceptions are at issue if one is to fully understand *loneliness* dynamics. Dealing with these perceptions requires first verifying what is actually happening, rather than responding immediately to one's emotional drives. If the perception is that someone is alone, true or not, then the emotions of depression and sadness which accompany loneliness become acute. These emotions then drive one to respond according to their perception. This dynamic causes one to leave church when the perception is that they do not belong. It is more an emotional response, rather than simple facts that can be diagnosed and corrected. Verification of facts is always the first step toward a solution.

There are ways to measure perceptions of loneliness. To measure a person's level of loneliness, researchers, such as John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, use a psychological assessment tool known as the UCLA Loneliness Scale.<sup>8</sup> Cacioppo says "It is simply a list of twenty questions with no right or wrong answers."<sup>9</sup> These twenty questions all begin with the subjective query: "*How do you feel when?*" Since loneliness is not isolated to the literal occurrence of being physically alone, and is perceptual, it is proper to use subjective questions which call forward one's perceptions of experiences. Nevertheless, loneliness is both a real issue and a subjective experience; one simply *feels*

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel W. Russel, "UCLA Loneliness Scale: Reliability, Validity, and Factor Structure," *Journal of Personality Assessment* (1996): 66.

<sup>9</sup> John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 5.



*alone*, that empty, hollow emotion, which then often develops into a deep sense of unworthiness. One feels as if they are shamefully hidden in back of a cave, all alone, and that others do not understand. That said, there remains the basic need for humans to have at least one person who believes and trusts in them, like Adam had Eve. But it does not stop there—it is not enough. Each person needs to belong to more than simply one person, but to a larger group as well.

According to Jean Vanier, author and founder of L'Arche Communities, "Each of us needs to belong, not just to one person but to a family, friends, a group and a culture. Belonging is important..."<sup>10</sup> Vanier found that the people most severely troubled with intellectual and developmental disabilities can discover healing by simple inclusion in a small community, through which they can experience love, acceptance, and belonging. The website for the Seattle expression of L'Arche states, "Our deepest desires are to live fully and in communion with one another, to love with zest and competence and to be a community attentive to the hopes, dreams, desires and needs of all our members."<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the emotional experience of loneliness, studies reveal that this social isolation, or perception of it, has a negative impact on health. The effect is comparable to the effects of high blood pressure, lack of exercise, obesity, or smoking.<sup>12</sup> Loneliness compounds both emotional and physical health issues, moving beyond perceptions to physiological symptoms as well. These symptoms result in physical fatigue and

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>11</sup> L'Arche, Community Seattle Branch, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.larcheusa.org/who-we-are/communities/seattle-washington>

<sup>12</sup> J.S. House, K.R. Landis, and D. Umberson, "Social Relationship and Health," *Science Magazine* 241 (July 29, 1988): 540-545.

predisposition to premature aging. Psychologist Kendra Cherry, in her article about loneliness causing premature aging quotes loneliness-expert John Cacioppo, “Lonely adults consume more alcohol and get less exercise than those who are not lonely. Their diet is higher in fat, their sleep is less efficient, and they report more daytime fatigue. Loneliness also disrupts the regulation of cellular processes deep within the body, predisposing us to premature aging.”<sup>13</sup>

Loneliness, therefore, affects humans both emotionally and physically. Where there are perceptions of unmet expectations of community, these perceptions carry negative physical ramifications, but don’t stop there. They also carry the negative results of poor self-esteem issues, resulting in a sense of personal unworthiness. Perceptions of shame experiences then result in a sense of being unaccepted and not belonging. Therefore, one’s self-esteem, self-identity and sense of belonging are critically vital factors to healthy emotions and healthy bodies. These perceptions are root issues in the millennial exodus from their established church communities.

So, why are millennials experiencing increasing loneliness? The reason is not due to a change in human nature, but instead a shift in unmet human needs. They are not sensing security within the established church, but instead have become insecure since there are many issues which do not make sense to them and for which they are not finding answers, as mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation when observing the results of Kinnaman’s study of millennials.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kendra Cherry, “What You Should Know About Loneliness: Causes and Health Consequences of Feeling Lonely,” Very Well Mind, February 22, 2018, <https://www.verywellmind.com/loneliness-causes-effects-and-treatments-2795749>

<sup>14</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

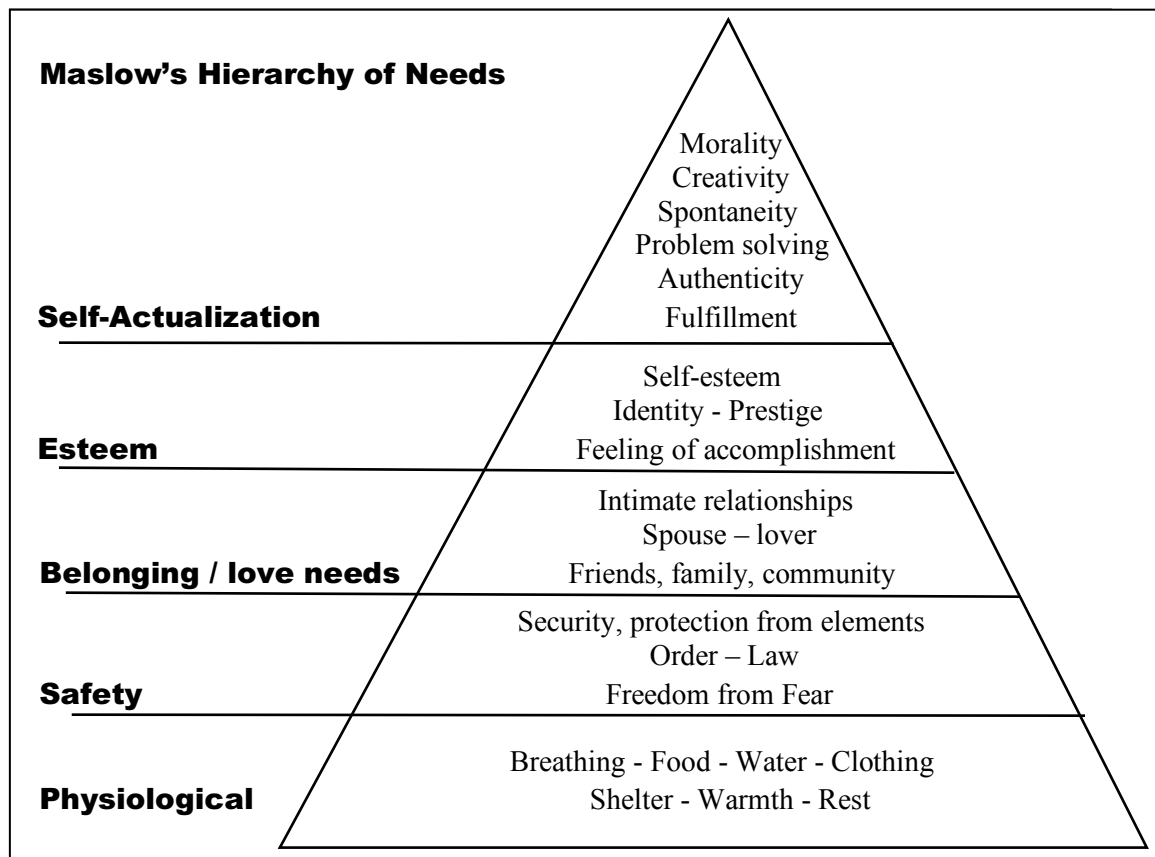
What motivates the millennials' quest for another community are unmet needs in personal identity and belonging. Exploring the dynamics of unmet human need and what motivates people was the life study of psychologist Abraham Maslow, who created a useful model portraying the results of his study called the Hierarchy of Needs (Figure 10). In 1943, he wrote a theory regarding basic human motivation and personality in which he created a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid.<sup>15</sup> Due to its popularity among human behavior researchers, he expanded it in 1953 into a full book on human motivation and personality.<sup>16</sup>

According to Maslow, humans have five basic human needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. People are in perpetual motion according to their need and are motivated to move to the next level after having their needs met. Later, Maslow added three more, but for simplicity, these basic five, which have been studied and used extensively in academic and business circles, are sufficient to assist this study in understanding more deeply the motivation behind the millennials' current quest.

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<sup>15</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (N.p.: BN Publishing, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954).



*Figure 10. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

Notice that levels three and four from the bottom (Figure 10) are directly applicable to this study: belonging and self-esteem. The *belonging* category, the focus at hand, includes the human needs for love through intimate relationships, such as spouse, friends, and family. This is what is often referred to as community. On the level just above belonging is the tier called esteem. This includes critical issues of personal identity, prestige, and a general sense of self-worth. These are two of main needs that motivate the current migration of the millennials.

In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, it is understood that each category of need must be met before moving to the next highest tier (from bottom to top). This, however, is not a concrete finding, since certain life circumstances can move people out of the security of

that gained level and forcing them to face again a lower level on the pyramid. Progress is often disrupted by such things as divorce, loss of a job, or moving to a new city, which causes an individual to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy. For example, moving from one home to another, or one city to another, unsettles a person, forcing a reestablishing process. By physically moving your home base, much of your attention is focused toward the two bottom levels of seeking shelter and security. In moving from one city to another, it is required to make new friends, seek a new church, find a new grocery store, and such, all of which takes energy away from issues like self-esteem and self-actualization.

This has bearing in that even if millennials appear set in belonging to a certain group, and even possess a sense of identity, this could be interrupted by such things as losing their apartment, which is the physiological, or lowest, level in the pyramid of needs. This would then dominate their attention and potentially cause a disruption in the group to which they belong. This could also shift their sense of personal identity. Their sense of need would then revert to a base survivalist expression of finding shelter, warmth, and place to rest.

### **An Alternative View: The Community vs. Individualism Argument**

In the research regarding belonging, a surprising alternate view emerged which pits *community* against the *freedom of individualism*, or, in other words, *security* against *self-actualization*. There appeared to be a potential negative aspect to community, which is a surprise since the Bible is so clear about the need for community. The millennials' search for a community provides a solution for loneliness and a place of acceptance, but it also presents a paradox. The very solution for social connectedness and order in a

group can also produce the opposite effect, preventing natural movement toward an individual's destiny and personal expression.

Through leading his global network of intentional communities, Jean Vanier insightfully has recognized that “the continual search for meaning and order and for an antidote to loneliness leads us to the necessity of community.”<sup>17</sup> This is a good thing and provides the solution for wandering millennials. However, Vanier goes on to say that “This touches on a real paradox, as humans, we crave belonging, and we need the connectedness to others that brings *security*, but this connectedness can prevent the natural movement and evolution that we need in our lives.”<sup>18</sup>

Humanity is caught between competing drives: the drive to belong to a group and self-discovery, that deep motivation to defer gratification and creatively risk more. Allender says, “Often boundaries attempt to protect and conserve, but arousal is to some degree related to the desire to risk, to push beyond what some consider safe. It is a strange linkage: we need safety to be able to relax, but too much rest moves us in the direction of boredom.”<sup>19</sup>

This can mean that, at least for a time, millennials' journey through those awkward middle segments of chaos and search for a new place to belong requires a vulnerable tension between a safe place and self-discovery. This becomes a time of insecurity and at the same time excitement as an innate drive to subdue and solve problems is aroused.

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<sup>17</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *God Loves Sex* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014) 51.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman fittingly refers to this potential squelching of the expanded-self the price to be paid for the security one receives from a community. He says, “There is a price to be paid for the privilege of ‘being in a community’—the price is paid in the currency of freedom, variously called ‘autonomy,’ ‘right to self-assertion,’ or the ‘right to be yourself.’”<sup>20</sup> In this case, you gain one thing and potentially lose another. By not discovering community, you miss the security and necessary companionship. Bauman feels that “Security and freedom are two equally precious and coveted values which could be better or worse balanced, but hardly ever fully reconciled and without friction.”<sup>21</sup>

This tension between *security* and *freedom*, or, in another context, between *community* and *individualism*, appears to be a factor for millennials leaving church. This is what was voiced in the Barna Group Study evidenced when they said that they felt a conflict between their desire to explore science and what their church’s stance was on science. Their individual passion for discovery was being blocked by the institutional church, or at least that was the perception.<sup>22</sup>

Not only is Bauman speaking to this conflict, Vanier also says that there is a tension between security and self-expression. He refers to it as “one of the great human dichotomies: the need for belonging and the need to be oneself, a real person, fully alive.”<sup>23</sup> The bonding available in community gives security since people know what to

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<sup>20</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Bauman, *Community*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 137.

<sup>23</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 49.

do and what they are to believe. In community, elders have real authority and therefore are empowered to care for the sick, teach preventative care, and even provide security, like a shepherd would for the sheep. But there are also disadvantages, according to Vanier: “Members of the community sacrifice their individual consciousness and freedom at the altar of security and unity, the altar of bonding.”<sup>24</sup> Vanier goes on to agree that Western societies place rights and needs of the individuals above the group, as was seen in the first chapter of this dissertation. Individualism, which can become competition against other people, often results in loneliness. It is this loneliness that has caused the millennials to seek out new ways of belonging and new types of groups.

This an alternative view since it says that community is not always helpful, but indeed has a down side. Is this why millennials appear to be wandering in the gap between security and belonging? There could be a missing part in the equation: the teachings of Jesus.

Specifically, this missing factor is where Jesus teaches that in the act of laying down one’s life, or denying selfish ego, that authentic life is finally gained. Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”<sup>25</sup> It appears that the paradox between security and freedom is not so much a community issue as it is an individual heart issue. The individual must humble themselves and not find their fulfillment in *self-actualization*, as Maslow surmised, but instead in *Christ-actualization*, as Jesus teaches.

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<sup>24</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 16:24-25.



It is the imperious self, the selfish ego, which must be crucified with Christ. One throws off the *ego-self*, and puts on a *Christ-self*, where Jesus is Lord of one's heart. As author and medical doctor Rebecca Beard writes: "The earth man or Adam-self must be reduced to a point where the Christ-self can be resurrected in us. Only then can we rise to a higher plane of expression."<sup>26</sup> In Beard's thinking, the old nature given us by Adam is replaced with the Second Adam's nature. Herein lies the war within the heart of humanity. Who is Lord of one's identity? Is it self or is it Christ?

This, then, shows that communities that do not have Christ as the central value and motivation would be unable to resolve the conflict between the security of community and freedom of the individual. In a Christ-centered community, everyone has given over their will to Jesus. The conflict is then resolved. But there is a surprising mystery which is revealed at this point. When one dies to self, they discover completeness. It is the resurrection principle where a new life, Jesus' life, fills everything. The individual comes into completeness, and the full measure of their potential, the very thing strived for yet had remained impossibly out of grasp, is at last acquired through the new life in Jesus.<sup>27</sup>

### **Pseudo-Community and Change Dynamics**

Since the churches that are losing millennials are primarily teaching Jesus as the Christ, who offers humanity this new nature, then why are these communities being given up in favor a new type of community? The only answer that makes sense then is that

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<sup>26</sup> Rebecca Beard, *Everyman's Mission* (Philadelphia: Merrybrook Press, 1952), 61.

<sup>27</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17. Humankind are new creations in Christ Jesus.

there is some sort of breakdown in these churches where they are failing to empty themselves of individualized ego in favor of authentic community centered on Jesus as Lord.

Are there changes that might benefit current churches to retain the millennial generation? The answer is yes, but it requires three actions. First a shift in emphasis away from leadership and toward followership, second is an emphasis away from evangelism and toward mission, and finally is courage to move through the chaos between changing from a pseudo community into an authentic community.

The first step for the current church is to embrace Jesus' teaching on followership. Jesus gave a life-changing invitation to his disciples to "follow me." The boomer-generation church, however, has been absorbed in leadership training, leadership conferences, and celebrating leaders of church movements—the opposite to what Jesus taught. It has become a trendy fixation according to Sweet, who boldly declares that "Leadership is an alien template that we have laid on the Bible, and followership is a key not tried in any lock."<sup>28</sup> Sweet, therefore, challenges the current emphasis on *leadership*, rarely a theme in Scripture, and which has so little to do with the ways or teachings of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Could this shift be the first place to start for the current church to begin in their move toward an authenticity that would appeal to the deepest heart of the millennials?

The second critical shift for the current church to make is a move away from what they have called *evangelism*, and instead toward *mission*. The concept of "soul winning," which has been prevalent in the church's previous generation, has taken on the meaning

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<sup>28</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 26.

<sup>29</sup> John 21:22.

of “inviting another person to come into the church building.” It was *attractional*, in that the true goal was filling up buildings, bolstering attendance, and increasing financial donations. Taking on modern marketing techniques, the church had migrated far away from the original mission of the church, which was go out—outside of the buildings. Jesus said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”<sup>30</sup> They chose to gather rather than send, as Jesus instructed. Shifting from *attractional* to *missional* is a big change from the current general philosophy of ministry.

In his book *So Beautiful*, Sweet describes the discovery that the current church is encouraged to make in a stark, yet unforgettable, metaphor: “The church needs to rediscover the Missionary Position, a posture that forces us to look at the world eye-to-eye and face-to-face without turning our backs. It doesn’t view the world as a ‘market’ but as the ‘mission.’”<sup>31</sup> This image depicts the personalized posture of oneness that Jesus desires with the church, a thing which he describes in his famous prayer over his disciples after the last supper scene. Jesus prays that his disciple would be one with himself as Jesus was one with the Father, saying, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”<sup>32</sup> This was more than simple unity, but was a deep, intimate bond. This bond is vital for the mission of the church in order that the world may know that the Father sent Jesus. Now they see this through his body, the church.

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<sup>30</sup> Mark 16:15.

<sup>31</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 56.

<sup>32</sup> John 17:22-23.

What, then, is a mission-shaped church? It does not appear that Jesus modeled anything close to the “evangelism campaign” model the current church activates in attempting to attract people. The thing that Jesus was known for was going around doing good deeds and healing the sick.<sup>33</sup> He modeled this, intending for his disciples to carry this forward into the future. N.T. Wright says it well: “The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term, in the future. And what he was promising for that future, and doing in that present, was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is.”<sup>34</sup> Current church appears enslaved in a silent mindset of saving souls for a timeless eternity, which has driven them to form evangelism campaigns around such a concept. However, this mindset does not line up with Jesus’ teachings, or the New Testament writers, and the millennials have noticed this.

In the current Western church there is a great chasm between two ideologies: evangelism and mission. To some, *evangelism* is saving souls for a timeless eternity, and what others term as *mission* means to them the working of justice, feeding the poor, and hope only in the present world. Neither are what Jesus taught and modeled. They are two extremes. The exodus of millennials is helpful since it is forcing the church to pay attention to this issue. According to Wright, “That great divide has nothing to do with Jesus and the New Testament and everything to do with the silent enslavement of many

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<sup>33</sup> Acts 10:38.

<sup>34</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 192.

Christians (both conservative and radical) to the Platonic ideology of the Enlightenment. Once we get the resurrection straight, we can and must get mission straight.”<sup>35</sup>

In referring to “getting the resurrection straight,” Wright means that many Christians focus their attention on a misguided belief that after death people end up in a timeless eternity in heaven. But what Wright is referring to, and the New Testament truth that brings hope, is the teachings which show that there is a resurrection from the dead for Christians, in which we will live with Jesus in a new heaven and here on a new earth. He calls it *life after, life after death*. Not simply dying and being with Christ, but that the next step is resurrection with Christ and dwelling on a new earth with him. This *great hope* for Christians is what is absent in either side of the current mindset divide between *evangelism* and *mission*. What may attract millennials is a gospel which fully focuses on resurrection at Jesus’s Second Coming and the hope of eternal life with Jesus on a new earth.<sup>36</sup> This is not the image of dying and floating on cloud playing harps during a really long worship service, as has been many times expressed, but instead a new life with Jesus on a healed planet earth, working and being productive together. This changes not only one’s concept of the future, but alters also our mindsets about the present, which can shift the church into an authentic mission-shaped church since now it is a hope-filled church. This hope, presented clearly, will be attractive to any generation, especially the millennials.

After these first two changes in the church are implemented, first moving from leadership to followership, and second moving from pseudo-evangelistic to authentic-

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<sup>35</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 193-194.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:19-21.

missional, then the reality of these changes causes a third consideration. It is the issue of change dynamics. Whenever there are transitions from one established mindset into a new one, there is a passage through the unwelcomed storm known as *chaos*. In this stage of chaos, it feels like all that was sacred and solid is blown away in the wind, and confusion sets in. It is an emotionally unstable place. This stage of chaos is what millennials are experiencing as they move away from their home church in search of a new authentic community.

Just after chaos, and before the destination of authentic is arrived at, there is yet another stage called *revelation*. Revelation is where previously unknown truths emerge like dawn's light. So, between pseudo and authentic, there is chaos and revelation, according to authors Alexander Shaia, and Michelle Guagy, who delineate these two middle stages.<sup>37</sup>

Many pastors and church officials feel they already have an authentic church and don't even recognize the need for change. Even if they did see the need, many are unwilling to pay the cost of chaos in order to implement revelation and authenticity. These churches often lack the essential *oneness* of heart—the kind of oneness that Jesus prayed for in John 17, and the kind of oneness that was present in Acts 2 as seen at Pentecost.

Taking as an example of major change, the disciples of Jesus gathered after his ascension to in an upper room. When the Pentecost festival had fully come, there exploded chaos and revelation. The church was born in these. Confusion ensued with

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<sup>37</sup> Alexander Shaia and Michelle L. Guagy, *Heart and Mind: The Four-Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation* (Melbourne, AU: Morningstar Press, 2013), 28.

sound of a mighty rushing and visible fire resting on each person's head. These individualized columns of fire surely reminded them of the stores of the Israelites seeing the column fire of God in the wilderness, but instead of resting in one place it separated and rested on each of them. They must have been confused, wondering if this sign was an acceptance by God and an imparting of his Spirit into everyone.

Then there was the manifestation of revelation when they began to speak in other tongues, declaring in languages foreign to them the glory of God—even natives around them marveled at the revelations. Change came following the chaos and revelation. They were never the same after this incident. Then further revelation occurred when Peter received a spirit of understanding by virtue of this advent of the Holy Spirit, and as a result he stood and explained the hidden meanings behind well-known prophecies. The result was that thousands of people believed in Christ Jesus. There was a significant mindset change as to what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus. This incident has even been noted as the birth of the church, a transition far more impactful than simply a mindset shift. This transition was accompanied with chaos first, then the revelation which followed.

Major transitions of mindsets in organizations move through chaos, and then into the stage of receiving revelation. They emerge into a new place, a place of authenticity. This transition is what must take place in churches, especially around the issues of moving from leadership to followership, and from attractional to missional.

Belonging to an authentic community is what millennials are looking for. If the church is unwilling to move through these stages of chaos and new revelation, then they will remain in the same state that they are now in. The statistics show sharp declines in

membership, which is a sign of a slow death. Meanwhile, new generations of people are born and are moving toward adulthood. They need a gospel relevant to their understanding. Can the church make this transition into becoming such a place, or will new churches or communities emerge to replace the old?



## CHAPTER 6:

## CONCLUSION

The heart-cry from America's millennials is for honor, identity, and belonging. They are no longer finding the things they crave in the churches of their childhood and, as a result, huge percentages are leaving these churches in search of a different kind of community to which they can belong. They leave because they are not getting the answers to the questions they are asking. In short, the church lost them.

They are not necessarily moving away from believing in God, but they certainly have stopped believing in church as they knew it. This young adult generation is finding God outside of the established church in ways that surprise church leaders. According to Mike McHargue, host of the Liturgist Podcast and Ask Science Mike, who has millions of listeners, they are “rediscovering God through science, expanded with available-nowhere-else insights into how neuroscience, physics, and biology help us understand God, spirituality, and ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

According to the Barna Group Report of young Americans surveyed, churches seem to portray an image of being antagonistic to science. Three out of ten of these young people sense a tension between church teachings and the science they are studying and learning, stating that “churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in.” Twenty-five percent go even further and embrace the perception that “Christianity is anti-science.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mike McHargue, *Finding God in the Waves: How I Lost My Faith and Found It Again through Science* (New York: Convergent Books, 2016), back cover.

<sup>2</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 137.

## Reframing the Message

Finding a way to bridge this communication gap becomes the task at hand for missionally minded preachers and church leadership. . The commission to make disciples of all cultures yet stands and motivates these preachers to discover ways to engage millennials with Jesus' message. One starting point is to reframe the gospel. Like the example of the painting being moved from obscurity in one part of the house to a more relevant part of the house, reframed, and put under new light, this must also happen with the gospel story—it needs to be re-storied.

The message needs to be framed relevant to the culture. So pay attention to this culture and discover what questions they are actually asking. This generation senses hopelessness; they are hiding in shame and their poor self-image. Wright says, "If we want a mission-shaped church, then what we need is a hope-shaped mission."<sup>3</sup> The message of the current church is not hope-filled, nor is it answering the cries of their hearts.

The first story to be told is that following Jesus just that—it is about *following* Jesus and not classes and seminars training for *leadership*. To communicate with millennials means telling the story of Jesus differently. McHargue does this well and tells the story of following Jesus like this:

There was a man walking along the shore of a lake. On his way, he runs into two fishermen. They're busy working, but he holds their attention long enough to tell them he'll show them how to bring in people instead of fish if they come with him. The two fishermen drop their nets and follow the man.

One of the fishermen was Simon (who is also called Peter and that he is one of the founders of the Church (with a big C)). When Peter dropped his net and followed the man—Jesus—he didn't know anything about the Messiah being a

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<sup>3</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 194.

sacrificial lamb or about crucifixion or resurrection. He just heard the man's story and believed it enough to follow him.

The Gospels are a collection of stories about Peter and the other 11 disciples constantly doubting, believing the wrong thing, or entirely missing the point of what Jesus was saying.

So, do I think it's OK not to know what you believe and still be a part of the Church?

Heck, yeah. In fact, I think that's exactly what following Jesus is about.<sup>4</sup>

This is an example, as told by a millennial, of reframing the story of what it means to follow Jesus. There is *acceptance* imbedded into the story, in spite of mistakes and lack of doctrinal knowledge. There is *belonging*, since Jesus collects twelve commoners, accepts them as followers, and together they discover God. They develop their identity from the community and who Jesus says they are, like when Jesus renamed Simon, meaning "blown by the wind," into Peter, meaning "the rock." Identities were being re-shaped.

To get to the heart of the shame millennials are experiencing, then the major biblical theme of *shame to honor* provides abundant stories to be reframed and told. The most obvious is the story or stories about the honor-status reversal of Jesus. He was a prince who voluntarily abdicated from the monarchy, and who embraced the shame of a lowly servant, destined for execution. This reversal in the storyline is where he is empowered by his father, a king of unlimited power, to conquer death, and raising up from the dead, he ascends to the highest throne over the earth and heaven, second only to the father.

There are many more stories carrying the theme of shame to honor. For example, Joseph, who experienced the shame of being sold into slavery by his wicked brothers,

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<sup>4</sup> McHargue, *Finding God in the Waves*, 2.

even being misunderstood and mistreated by his new employers, but by the power of God he was raised to the highest honor in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh. There is also David, the forgotten youngest of eight sons, who is elevated to being the king of the nation. There is Onesimus, the useless slave who robs his master and runs away from Colossae to Rome. There he become a disciple of Paul the Apostle and is sent back home with a cover letter, called Philemon, and emerges in church history as the leading pastor of the Colossian church.

And there are more, such as Peter, who was shamed because he betrayed his master, Jesus, but who receives the honor of becoming a rock and founding pillar in Jesus' church. Finally, Paul should be also listed in the great shame-to-honor stories. He moved from being a persecutor and murder of Christians to the high honor of Apostle and author of approximately half of the New Testament. There seems to be no lack of fresh stories that tell of Jesus' ability to move one from shame to honor. This is a message of hope perfectly shaped for the millennial generation.

### **Walking Out of the Cave of Shame**

The first step in walking someone out of their cave of shame is *storytelling*. One begins by telling their own story and naming their own journey out of the shame in to the light of honor. This begins to build trust and attunement—that oneness that is felt as two people are in tune with each other at a heart level. It is the image of grabbing their hand, standing together, and walking together. It is a journey with another person. Leading the way is the Light, Jesus, as his stories are relayed and build hope.

This leads into the second step for walking someone out of a cave of shame. It takes the work of the spirit of Jesus. They must not only hear about Jesus, but must know

him in their heart. This work, though assisted by the person walking beside them, is solely accomplished by the power of Jesus and his Spirit. It is a supernatural work, and even those who can see and understand it find it outside of their ability to make happen. This is spiritual and personal for each individual.

The final step is to walk them completely out of their cave of shame into the full light, whereupon they are introduced to many other people who have also been rescued from shame-caves. These other people can relate and will be quick to accept them and include them into the community of the like-hearted. This, then, begins to fulfill their deep need for a place to belong.

### **Reframing Doctrine for a Message of Hope**

After walking millennials out of the cave of shame and into the light, it becomes necessary to reframe a very specific and particularly troublesome doctrine that has become a stumbling block and major deterrent for millennials. This doctrine has been commonly named Original Sin, accompanied by an image of a wrathful God, which is foundational in Reformed and Western Theology. Being derived from Western culture, it focuses upon the sin-response of *guilt/innocence*. This theology seems outdated to the millennial, who has shifted to a shame/honor mindset—quite a different thing.

The fact that millennials are leaving the church is undeniable. The gospel they are hearing is not making sense to them—it is not good news. This image of a wrathful God is seen preached by Puritan revivalist Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon “Sinners

in the Hands of an Angry God.”<sup>5</sup> It focuses on the inherent nature of man being sinful, which has made man detestable in God’s eyes. Thus, in Edwards’ sermon, God is dangling man by a thin thread over the fires of hell and might at any moment drop him into eternal punishment. This is not good news, nor is it an accurate picture of the God who loved the world so much that he gave his only son.

Having been taught that *humanity is bad* has left disciples haunted by guilt, shame, and fear, which has crippled their relationship to God. This doctrine is long overdue to be reframed. Millennials should hear instead that they are being held in the hands of loving God.<sup>6</sup> God is not angry with humanity, but quite the opposite. Millennials have not been told that God created man as good, though capable of evil, and that He established astounding potentials into each person. God has endowed humanity with an Original Blessing, which supersedes any sin committed thereafter. It is for the full restoration of this blessing that Jesus came to earth as a human.

The answer to the big question “Who am I?” has been obscured by this centuries-old doctrine of *original sin*, which begins its reasoning at the *fall of man* (Genesis 3) and not the *creation of man* (Genesis 1). Many people believe that because of the fall of Adam, human nature that is now completely bad, corrupted, and even depraved. This doctrine was embedded into church doctrine through the teachings of the Reformers, and as a result has thrown a confusing, dark shadow upon much of Christianity, which has

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, a sermon preached at Enfield, July 8, 1741,” Digital Commons of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=etas>.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 22.

resulted in a dualistic mindset—a sense of separation from God—where we are in one place (bad) and God in another (good).

Millennials exposed to this thinking believe Christianity teaches to distrust their bodies, their drives, and therefore their senses. To them, this seems incongruent when they encounter the authentic Jesus, who teaches us to be fully alive, engage all senses, and to love our humanness. So, when millennials experience failures and feel the pain of guilt/shame, they determine the church teachings as the cause. Since the need for love and acceptance is a stronger drive, they leave what they believe is the source of their shame—the church community and its doctrines of a God of wrath.

Danielle Shroyer, a sought-after speaker and respected pastor, says, “Of the world’s major religions, only Christianity has a doctrine of original sin.”<sup>7</sup> She explains the results of this by saying, “More than any other idea, the doctrine of original sin has slowly eroded our understanding of our relationship with God.”<sup>8</sup> It is radically altering our original identity as those who are loved and blessed by God; subsequently, our personal self-esteem erodes. Instead of seeing ourselves deeply connected to God, as Jesus prayed we would be,<sup>9</sup> the doctrine of original sin has convinced us that we are bad, and since God is good, therefore we are separated and we stand at a distance from each other. This is opposite to the incarnational ways of Jesus, which we see evidenced in the meaning of his name Emmanuel: *God with us*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Danielle Shroyer, *Original Blessing: Putting Sin in its Rightful Place* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2016), 175, back cover copy.

<sup>8</sup> Shroyer, *Original Blessing*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> John 17: 21.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 1:23; Emmanuel means *God with us*.

In reference to that dark cloud hovering over Western society due to the excessive emphasis on original sin, Matthew Fox writes, “What religion must let go of in the West is an exclusively fall/redemption model of spirituality—a model that has dominated theology...that does not teach believers about the New Creation or creativity... [that of] play, pleasure, and the God of delight.”<sup>11</sup> It is this thinking that has millennials “done” with the Western church, yet not abandoning their quest for God or for a hope-filled personal identity.

To reframe this doctrine requires a brief journey into human origins and forming a gospel centered on the concept of Original Blessing. The original blessing bestowed upon mankind has four components: “be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue” (Genesis 1:28). Compare this to just six verses earlier (Genesis 1:22), when God finished creating the fish and birds, we see that the blessing on them was significantly less. It included the same first three parts that were given to man, but did not contain the fourth part, to *subdue*. Man alone was blessed with the additional ability to *subdue*.

This added blessing, to *subdue*, carries the creative energy of God. Of this energy, author and conference speaker Harold Eberle says, “It motivates and inspires individuals to advance in their personal life. They want to make progress.”<sup>12</sup> It is this component put into the identity of man’s nature which causes people to want to advance. Endowed with God’s creativity, we have the ability to problem-solve, or overcome difficulties by bringing creative solutions. The human quest to subdue natural elements eventually took them into modern medicine, science, technology, and even to the moon. Vanier says,

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Eberle, *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation: An Exposition of the Father-Son Theology*, 2nd ed. (Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing, 2016), 288.



“Every generation wants to achieve more than the preceding one.”<sup>13</sup> But when someone loses sight of this goodness that stirs within them, they can become confused about their identities, and even begin to despair.

The way one frames scripture is a critical matter. An example would be comparing a scripture from the two perspectives of *original sin* versus *original blessing*. Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The first part of the scriptural example brings focus is upon original sin’s teaching, which determines a person guilty of sin. The latter part of the verse focuses on falling short of your potential, but allows for the opportunity to eventually achieve that goal, which in this case is “glory.” Original sin doctrine would not allow for a human to be able to attain such glory. Dependent upon your mindset, you will focus on the hopelessness of a fixed human state, or upon the vast potential available through the work of Jesus.

### **A Complete Person**

Healthy personal identity, a complete person, is the desired outcome of this re-framed preaching, best articulated in Colossians 1:28 (NASB): “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” Notice that the goal of “presenting every man complete in Christ,” infers a growth journey toward a destiny. That end is a maturity identified elsewhere as the “full measure of the stature of Jesus.”<sup>14</sup> This fullness can be expressed by the vocabulary gained through the study of the design-gifts (see Chapter 4).

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<sup>13</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 4:13.

This goal of presenting every person complete in Christ is the same as the Creator's goal when he imprinted humanity with his image. Millennials appear hungry for a reframed gospel which presents a loving God who insures that His perpetual good imprint is in them, and who walks them out of shame and continues beside with them as their journey unfolds, and especially as they are joined together in an authentic community of like-hearted discoverers.

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