

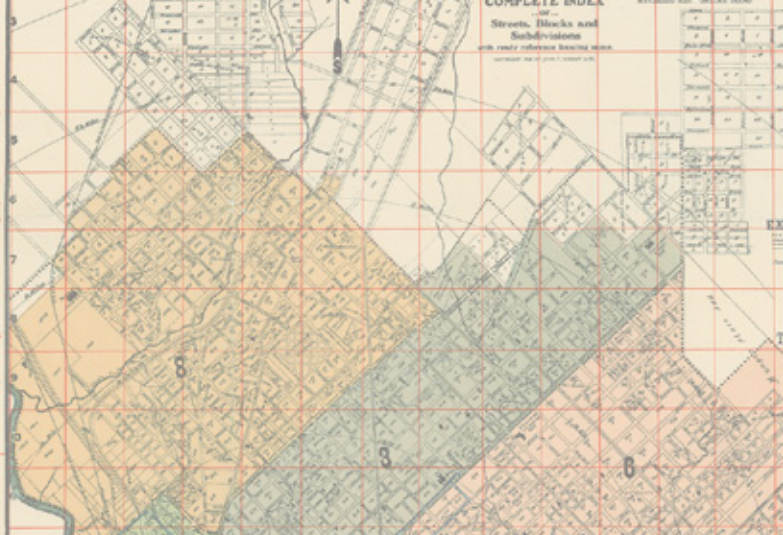
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James C. Denison, Ph.D., is a cultural apologist, building a bridge between faith and culture by engaging contemporary issues with biblical truth. He founded the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture in February 2009. Since that time, he has spoken to over 100,000 people. He is the author of seven books, including his most recent, *Radical Islam: What You Need to Know*.

Dr. Denison writes a cultural commentary available at [denisonforum.org](http://denisonforum.org). His free daily commentary is distributed around the world to over 90,000 subscribers in 203 countries. He writes for the *Dallas Morning News*, contributing weekly to the “Texas Faith Blog,” and is a guest columnist for *The Christian Post*. He has also taught world religions for 25 years with four seminaries. He has spoken in China, Cuba, Brazil, Australia, Europe, Israel, Greece, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Turkey and served as a short-term missionary to East Malaysia, in Southeast Asia. He also leads frequent study tours in Israel, Greece, and Europe.

He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion and Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and received a Doctor of Divinity degree from Dallas Baptist University.

His wife, Janet, is an author and speaker ([janetdenison.com](http://janetdenison.com)). They live in Dallas, and have two children and one grandchild.

*culture changing*  
**CHRISTIANS**

PUTTING THE *gospel*  
INTO *practice*

*introduction:*

## **JOINING THE GREAT AWAKENING**

Henry Kissinger's latest book is titled *World Order*.<sup>1</sup> In it, Dr. Kissinger notes that the concept of universal democracy is in crisis. He cites the breakdown of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, the birth of ISIS, and the civil war in Libya as examples. We could add conflict in the Middle East and the stalemate over nuclear weapons in Iran. What's going on?

Dr. Kissinger begins his narrative with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia which ended Europe's Thirty Years' War. It mandated independent nation-states that would be economically interdependent, lessening the likelihood of war among them. This notion has prevailed in Europe and its colonies for the last four centuries.



Meanwhile, Russia was led by a tsar and a national church; China and the East were led by emperors and dynasties; Islam's global community (the *ummah*) was led by a Caliph; and America fostered the ideal of participatory democracy. These contradictory worldviews could all coexist because the world was so large. What happened in Russia was not especially relevant to America; Chinese politics didn't affect Europe.

What changed? World War I ended the caliphate; World War II ushered in American superpower status. With the demise of the Soviet Union, participatory democracy began making inroads in Russia, China, and around the world. But now the nations are reverting to their cultural DNA—many Muslims are rallying to the Islamic State and its claim to be a caliphate; Russia's president functions more as a tsar; China's Communist Party is firmly entrenched.

The reason? Global economic interdependence. Europe needs Russian energy more than it cares about Russian democracy; America needs Chinese economic partnership more than we care about their governance. What is the future? According to Dr. Kissinger, it's hard to say.

The good news is that God knows the future we cannot see. His Kingdom is on the march today in unprecedented ways. In fact, there is a fifth Great Awakening occurring in our world right now. According to David Barrett, author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 82,000 people become Christians every day. More are coming to Christ than at any time in Christian history.

This Awakening is sweeping Asia. South Korea is one-third to one-half "born again" Christian. Five of the ten largest churches in the world are in South Korea. Last year they sent more missionaries into the world than America did.

There is a worship movement growing in Australia right now. Central and South America are experiencing a Pentecostal revival. When I was in Cuba recently, we saw 330 professions of faith on the Sunday morning I preached. This was the result of their Saturday outreach ministry: 294 Cubans knocked on 1,050 doors and shared the gospel with 5,000 Cubans. The next day, 330 people came to Christ.

Barrett documents 32,000 conversions every day in sub-Saharan Africa. He believes there are 25,000 conversions every day in the People's Republic of China. Some missiologists think the number is closer to 100,000. By some measures, the PRC is now the largest Christian nation on earth.

More Muslims are becoming Christians than any time in history. Thousands of Muslims are seeing visions and dreams of Jesus and coming to faith in him as their Lord. More Jewish people are coming to Christ than at any time in Christian history.

However, of the 82,000 coming to Christ every day around the world, only 6,000 are in Europe and North America, combined. While much of the world is experiencing an explosion in Christian growth, we are living in a time of unprecedented skepticism in the Western world with regard to historic Christianity.

In recent surveys, the number of Americans who have "no religion" has doubled, while the number who call themselves "atheist" or "agnostic" has quadrupled to twice the number of Episcopalians in our country.

Spiritual trends in Europe are even more discouraging. A recent Harris Poll conducted a large survey of religious beliefs in Europe. It found that 62% in Italy believe in the existence of a supreme being, 48% in Spain, 41% in Germany, 35% in England, and 27% in France.

In Great Britain today, there are four times as many Muslims attending mosque on Friday as Christians attending worship on Sunday. The most common name given to a newborn in England today is "Muhammad." Twenty-five percent of Brussels is Muslim. Meanwhile, the West continues to struggle with radical Islam, the greatest threat our civilization has ever faced.

What explains the difference? There have been four Great Awakenings in the Western world—in 1734, 1792, 1858, and 1904-5. We desperately need a Fifth Awakening in our culture.

*for reflection:*

How fully is your church encountering the transforming power of God? When was the last time you were awed by him in worship? When was the last time reading his word changed something specific in your life? Are you experiencing his full freedom in defeating temptation and sin? Are you winning as many people to Jesus as you long to bring to him? Is your church clearly impacting your culture for the Kingdom? When you assess the strength of your relationship with the living Lord, what descriptions come to mind?

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I am convinced that culture-changing Christian leaders is the answer. As we will see in this handbook, culture changes top-down. When people of influence use their platform to advance the gospel, a movement grows that changes society for good. How can we become catalysts for such transformation? Consider three imperatives: equipping, influencing, and engaging.

## EQUIPPING

*"Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"*

(Ephesians 4:11-13).

"God does not call the equipped—he equips the called." I've heard this assertion for years. Not until I began traveling to Cuba did I see it fully in action.

More than a million Cubans have come to Christ in the last decade. Nearly all were won to Jesus and discipled by people who have received no formal theological training. Seminaries are small and underfunded in Cuba. Internet access is extremely limited, and theological resources are difficult to obtain. And yet, the Kingdom is advancing in unprecedented ways there.

One reason: leaders teach others to become leaders. Pastors have intentional strategies to equip members to be ministers. Since they cannot rely on seminary graduates, they must produce their own missionaries and gospel servants. And God is blessing their work.

Learning from Cuban Christians, I have discovered three commitments that are essential to equipping God's people for works of service.

## *Be secure in your salvation*

Cuban pastors deal with people who come from a remarkably wide spectrum of religious beliefs. Everything from Santaria and voodoo to Protestant denominations to Roman Catholicism is present on the island. So they begin the equipping process by helping people be sure that they have received salvation from Jesus and are secure in their relationship with him.

How can we be so secure today?

### *How to receive salvation*

Scripture makes clear these facts:

- *God loves you.* He created you and wants to have a personal relationship with you now on earth and eternally in heaven (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- *Sin has separated you from God.* The Bible defines "sin" as choosing our will over God's. We have each made this mistake (Romans 3:23). Our sins have now separated us from our holy God, and he cannot allow us into his perfect heaven (Jeremiah 2:14-15; Isaiah 59:1-2). Instead, we are each destined for an eternity separated from God in hell (Revelation 19:11-15).
- *You cannot repair your broken relationship with God.* Many people think we can be good or religious enough to earn God's forgiveness and go to heaven when we die. But the Bible teaches that the only payment for sin is death (Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:20). Someone must die for the sins we have committed.
- *Jesus died to pay the debt owed by your sins.* Since Jesus was sinless and owed no debt to God, his death could pay for our sins (1 Peter 1:19). He took our place on the cross and suffered the penalty we deserved (2 Corinthians 5:21). His death now makes it possible for a righteous God to forgive our sins and offer us salvation (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

- *You must receive the gift he died to give.* Now you must choose to trust in what Jesus has done for you rather than trusting in your own efforts to restore your relationship with God. In faith, rely completely on Jesus to make you right with God. Confess your sins and mistakes to God, and choose to live by God's word and will. Decide that you will make Jesus the Lord and Master of your life.

How can you make this decision? Through prayer you can meet Jesus today. There is no single prayer you must pray to become a Christian, no magic formula. But the following words are one way to trust Christ as Lord. They are the prayer I offered to God on September 9, 1973, when I first trusted in Jesus as my Savior. If you will pray them with the sincere commitment of your heart and life, you will join me in knowing Jesus personally and living for him as your Lord.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for loving me. Thank you that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins and failures. I admit to you that I am a sinner, that I need you to save me. I ask you to forgive me for my sins. I turn from them now. I invite Jesus into my life as my Savior and Lord. I turn my life over to him. I will live for him as long as I live. Thank you for giving me eternal life and making me the child of God. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

If you prayed this prayer for the first time just now, please tell someone about your decision. Christianity cannot be lived alone. A coal by itself goes out—it needs the heat of other coals. Share your new faith with someone you trust, and with a church where you can grow in your commitment to Christ.

### *for reflection:*

Do you know of a time when you asked Jesus Christ to forgive your sins and become your Lord? If not, will you reach out to a Christian this week to ask him or her to help you meet Jesus? If you know that you have met Christ, what do you remember about your experience?

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## *How to be secure in your salvation*

How can you know that you are "saved," that you have a personal relationship with God? What do you do when doubts arise? How can you be sure?

Your salvation does not depend on anything you can do, but only on what God has done for you. If you have invited Jesus Christ to be your Savior and Lord, his word promises that he has done what you asked him to do. He has forgiven your failures and sins, and made you the child of God. You have his word on it:

- "Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). At the moment you "believed in him," you received eternal life.
- "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26). You have eternal life, right now. You will never perish. When you breathe your last breath here, you breathe your first breath in heaven.
- "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). You are not holding onto him—he's holding onto you.
- "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). You are a new creation, the child of God. It is not possible for you to return to where you were before you met Christ.

You are his child, and will always be his child, just as my children will always be my children. No matter how they feel, or what they say or do, they cannot go back and not be my sons, because they were born as my sons. You were "born again" as the child of God, and will be his child forever.

There will likely be times when you don't feel close to God, when you don't feel like going to worship, or reading the Bible, or praying. But the Bible nowhere tells us how it feels to be a Christian. Our feelings depend on many factors besides our relationship with God. They are the caboose at the end of the train of faith, not its engine.

If you're married, there may be times when you feel closer to your spouse than others—but you're still married. An employee's feelings about her employer don't change the fact that she has a job. A student's feelings about his teachers don't change the fact that he's in school. Feelings don't change facts.

Once you have chosen to trust in Jesus, you have become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Now it is impossible for you to choose to lose your salvation. A child cannot choose later not to be born. If a person claims he once knew Jesus but now rejects him, he never really knew him personally.

Unfortunately, we still sin and fall short of the people our Father wants us to be. Fortunately, our assurance is not based on our abilities but God's grace. He says that we are his children. His Son died to pay off our spiritual debt so we could join his eternal family. This is the word of the Lord.

It takes as much faith to believe in God now as it did when you first trusted in Jesus. Faith is a relationship, and no relationship can be proven. No married couple can prove to someone outside their family that they love each other. No friends can prove their friendship to those who have not experienced it. It's impossible to explain love to someone who has never experienced it. Relationships are self-validating—the more they are experienced, the stronger they become.

So don't wait until you feel close to God—act as though you are. Read his word, pray, worship him personally and publicly, and get involved in the life and work of a local church. Act on your faith, and you'll find your faith growing deeper and stronger.

You were made by God for this purpose: to know Jesus and make him known. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the only piece that will fit the hole in your spiritual jigsaw puzzle. He is the hub into which all the spokes of your life fit, the "true north" on your compass.

### *for reflection:*

If anything is causing you to question the reality of your salvation, write it here.

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Will you speak this week to a fellow Christian about the security of your salvation?



## *Submit daily to the Holy Spirit*

Do you believe Scripture when it says that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)? Do you believe that God can do anything today he wishes, and that he can move in our lives with the same power we see in the New Testament?

Then why doesn't the Spirit work like this today in us? Where he doesn't, the simple reason is that we haven't asked him to. We haven't done what Scripture teaches us to do, that we might know his power today.

So, what are we to do? Ephesians 5:18 is our key: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Let's walk through this verse, step by step, and experience it in our lives today.

### **FIRST**

*Receive the Holy Spirit in salvation.* This verse is to believers, and it assumes that we have already asked Jesus to forgive our sins and be our Lord. When we do, the Holy Spirit moves into our lives (cf. Romans 8:9).

### **SECOND**

*Decide that you need his power.* Not just his salvation, but his power. A carpenter knows that a drill needs power. Do you know that you and your church need power as well?

To be "filled" by the Spirit means to be under his control. Just as someone drunk with wine is "under the influence," so a Christian is to be "under the influence" of the Holy Spirit. The first Christians needed this power, and they knew it. They were 120, charged with taking Christ to a hostile nation of 4,000,000 and an ungodly Empire of 25,000,000. This meant that each Christian had to win more than 30,000 just in Israel to fulfill God's purpose for them.

But Jesus had promised them his help: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). So they stayed in Jerusalem, at the risk of their own lives, until they received the power they needed.

You and I need this same power today. Read Zechariah 4:6: "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty." This verse should convict us every time we read it: "The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Cor. 4:20). Do we have all the power we should? All that we need?

God will not do for us what we try to do for ourselves. If we are comfortable and complacent with our spiritual lives, our witness, our ministry in our community and world, then we will not know the power of God's Spirit. A drill can do some good on its own, without electrical power, as we use our own strength. Some of us like the credit, we don't like being dependent on others, we're convinced we can do it ourselves. But we cannot.

This step is the hardest for most of us, and essential: we must admit that we need him. That we need him as desperately as these first Christians did. Only then can he move in power in our lives.

### *for reflection:*

Do you want the Spirit to have control of your life? To empower you? Write your response to his invitation here.

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### **THIRD**

*Be cleansed from all that hinders him.* I can connect my drill to a socket and still have no power, if the plug is corroded. The plug must be clean for the power to flow. In the very same way, we are seeking the power of the Holy Spirit, and he cannot fill and control a dirty vessel. He cannot give his power with a dirty plug. We must be clean first.

Are you willing to be cleansed from everything which hinders the Holy Spirit in your life? Then take a moment for a moral inventory.

### *for reflection:*

Write on a separate sheet of paper anything which is hindering the Spirit in your life. If you're not sure, ask him and he'll show you. Confess these sins specifically to God, and claim his cleansing.

### **FOURTH**

*Ask him to control and empower your life.* The drill doesn't have to do this, for it has no will. But we do. And we must ask the Spirit to control and empower us, before he will.

Will you do this, right now? In prayer, simply ask the Spirit to take control of your life, your mind, your time, your abilities. Surrender your will to him. Promise to obey him wherever he leads you.

And believe that he has. Nowhere does the Bible describe how it "feels" to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Some of us will feel something unusual; others will not. I seldom do. The proof is in the results, not the feeling. So step out in faith, believing that the Spirit has empowered you, for he has.

And do this daily. The literal Greek is, "Be continually being filled." Whenever sin corrodes your relationship with him, confess it and claim cleansing. Then reconnect with the Spirit. Stay in communion with him all through the day—stay "plugged in."

As you do, remember that God empowers us according to his purpose for us. The Holy Spirit never empowered a Christian in the Book of Acts except to make him or her a more effective witness. If we are not willing to share Christ, we will not have the power of the Spirit. If we are, we will.

*for reflection:*

Write your own prayer of surrender to the Holy Spirit.

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Dwight Moody preached to over one hundred million souls in his ministry. He founded what became Moody Bible College, and was widely considered one of the godliest men in America. His prayers have been recorded and published; his passion for the lost was legendary. And yet Moody often said of his own soul, "I am a leaky bucket, and I need to be refilled daily." If he needed this, so do I. Do you?

## *Seek continued transformation*

Once we are certain we have trusted Christ as our Savior and submitted our lives to the control of his Spirit, there is one other step we must take in being equipped spiritually to change our culture.

As 2 Chronicles 7 unfolds, Solomon and the people of Israel have just finished their Temple. This is the high-water mark in the history of the Jewish people. Their borders extend from present-day Syria to the Sinai Peninsula. Their wealth and military might are unequaled in the region. The king has accumulated 100,000 talents of gold (3,750 tons) and a million talents of silver (37,500 tons; 1 Chronicles. 21:14)—a net worth of more than \$58 billion today. Solomon is also the wisest man who has ever lived. And now he has just constructed a fabulous house of worship for his nation's God.

But Israel's future prosperity was in no sense guaranteed.

Their Lord warned them that future rebellion would lead to his punishment. In this event he would "shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people" (2 Chron. 7:13). In a world dependent on rain for crops, defenseless against ravaging locusts or plague, such events would be totally catastrophic.

As it turned out, their future was in greater peril than they knew. Shortly after Solomon's death, their nation would be divided by civil war. The ten northern tribes would be annihilated and absorbed by Assyria; the two southern tribes would be enslaved by Babylon and then dominated by Persia, Greece, and Rome before their nation was disbanded and destroyed. Their nation would not be constituted again for 20 centuries, and today faces renewed hostility, as the ongoing conflict in Gaza demonstrates.

Is their situation relevant to ours?

America is the world's only superpower. Our economy, even in these difficult times, is as large as Japan, China, Germany, India, and Great Britain combined. More Americans go to church each week than in any other nation in the Western world. Surely our future is assured.

Or perhaps not. We are still recovering from the greatest financial crisis we've seen in 80 years. The Great Recession wiped out nearly \$14 trillion in market value and destroyed four million jobs. Our military involvement in Iraq has continued longer than any war in our history. And militant Islam continues its ascent, constituting what I consider to be the greatest threat the West has ever faced. At its root it is a spiritual movement, and must be countered by a spiritual movement of even greater power and passion.

What must we do? "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (v. 14). "My people, who are called by my name" includes us—you and me, all who have made Jesus their Lord. We are "Christians," literally "little Christs," those who are the children of God and thus own his name. Awakening in the nation starts with us, here, today.

*How?*

**FIRST**

Our first step is to "humble ourselves," to admit our need of God. It is a spiritual fact that God cannot do for us what we try to do for ourselves. If you do not believe that our city and nation needs a mighty movement of God, you will miss that movement. A doctor cannot heal a patient who will not admit an illness. God cannot give what we will not admit we need. If we do not believe that we need more of God than we have, we will not have the God we need.

Begin every day by making Jesus King of that day. Put him on the throne of your heart and life. Surrender your day to him, praying through your plans and submitting them to his lordship. He came to inaugurate the "kingdom of God" (Matthew 4:17), that realm where his will is done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). When he returns, his name will be "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16). He wants to be your King on Monday, not just Sunday. He wants to be King of all your possessions, not just those you donate to the church; of all your time, not just what you spend in religious activities; of all your thoughts and attitudes, not just those you make public.

Have you made him your King today?

**SECOND**

We "pray." The Hebrew word describes a national plea for repentance. We are instructed by God to pray for our nation and her leaders: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4). We are called to pray every day for our nation, asking God for a great spiritual movement in our land and time.

Will you join with a fellow believer in praying regularly for spiritual awakening in our land?

**THIRD**

We "seek his face." "Seek" means to "strive to discover in great earnest." "Face" translates the Hebrew word for intimate and personal relationship. Are you seeking a closer relationship with God today than you have ever had? Begin the day by surrendering it to Jesus as your Lord. Worship him. Read his word. Pray about the opportunities and problems before you. And spend the day seeking a close communion with your Father.

Would God say you are seeking his face today?

**FOURTH**

We "turn from our wicked ways." "Ways" translates the Hebrew for "roads," "walkways." We get out of the wrong ways of life, living in repentance and obedience. A regular spiritual inventory is essential. It is vital that we admit our sin as soon as we commit it, turning to God and seeking his forgiving grace. The Holy Spirit cannot use fully a vessel that is unholy.

*for reflection:*

Write your commitment to making Jesus your King and beginning your day by seeking his face and turning from your wicked ways.

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Write the names of believers you'll ask this week to pray with you for spiritual awakening.

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## INFLUENCING

*"Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord,  
and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel"*  
(Ezra 7:10).

Ezra was a priest and scholar. His ministry led to spiritual renewal that transformed his nation. Here was his secret: he sought to become the change he sought to effect. He studied God's word, obeyed it, and then taught it to others—in that order.

Culture changes for the Kingdom when people use their influence for God's glory. How can we be Ezra for today?

# James Davison Hunter

James Davison Hunter is the LaBrosse-Levinson Distinguished Professor of Religion, Culture, and Social Theory at the University of Virginia. He is also founder of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. Dr. Hunter coined the phrase "culture war," and is one of the most astute interpreters of Western culture today. His magnum opus is titled, *To Change the World*.<sup>2</sup> How does he think culture changes? He begins with ways it does not.

Culture does not change by winning elections. For instance, during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and the first George Bush, divorce rates escalated. Gay marriage made significant inroads in American culture during the presidency of the second George Bush.

Culture does not change by evangelism and church attendance. More than 80% of Americans are identified with some faith community, yet our culture is intensely secularistic and materialistic. By contrast, the Jewish community has never comprised more than 3.5% of our population, yet its contributions to science, literature, art, music, film and architecture have been remarkable. At least 180 Jews have been awarded the Nobel Prize, constituting 36% of all American recipients.

Culture does not change by popularity. While more evangelical books are being sold than ever before, they primarily target the faith community and exist out of the cultural mainstream. Few are ever reviewed by the New York Times or Wall Street Journal. People have heard of Rick Warren and Joel Osteen, but we cannot claim that our culture has been changed by their popularity.

How does a culture change? Here is the matrix, according to Hunter.

## KNOWLEDGE

*theoretical* ➤ *high-end education* ➤ *practical/everyday*

## MORALITY

*abstract* ➤ *activist* ➤ *grass roots*

## AESTHETICS

*high brow* ➤ *upper middle brow* ➤ *low brow*

# for KNOWLEDGE

## *Theoretical*

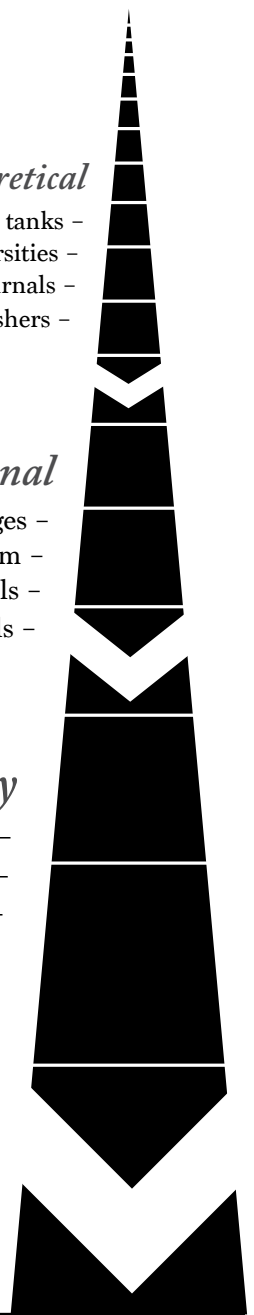
- Academic think tanks -
- Elite research universities -
- Elite opinion magazines and journals -
- Elite and first tier university publishers -

## *High-end educational*

- First and second tier colleges -
- High-end journalism -
- Seminaries and divinity schools -
- Elite private schools -

## *Practical / everyday*

- Journalism (print and electronic) -
- The Internet -
- Mass-market book publishing -
- Churches, synagogues, and teaching ministries -
- Public education -
- Christian schools -

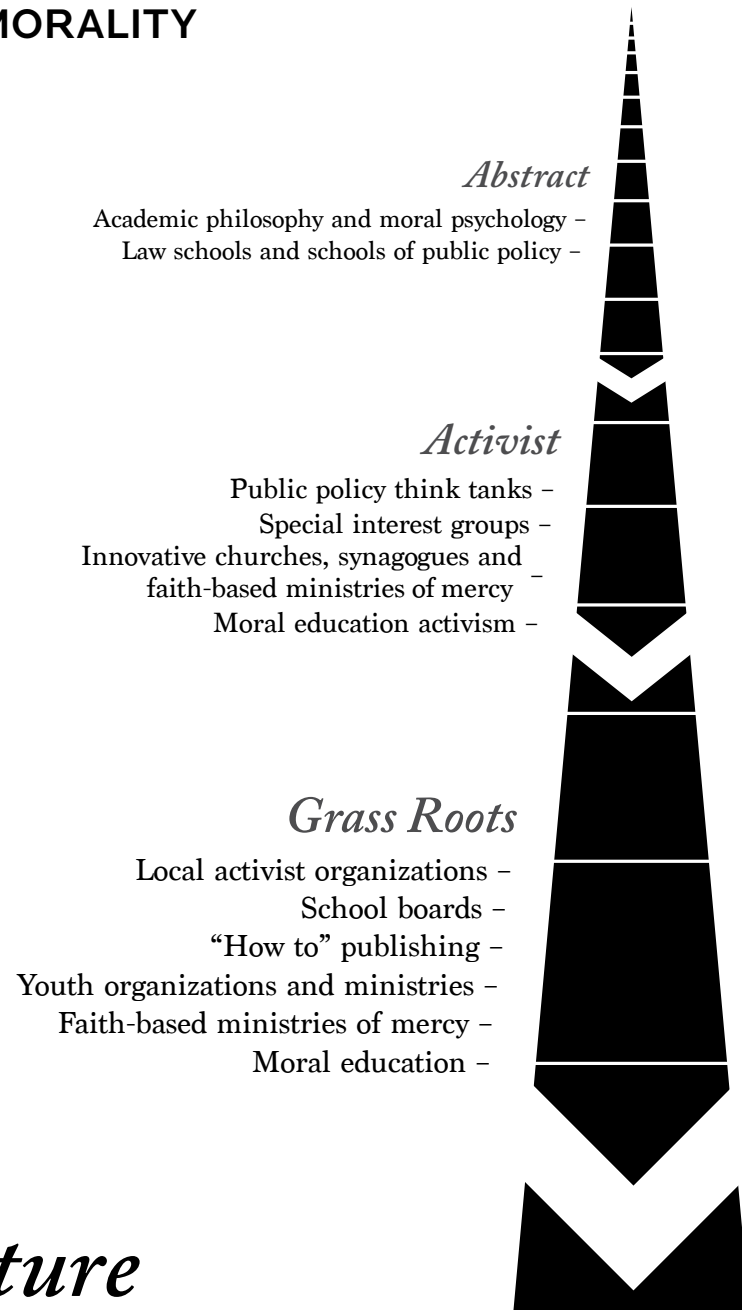


# *culture*

# CHANGE

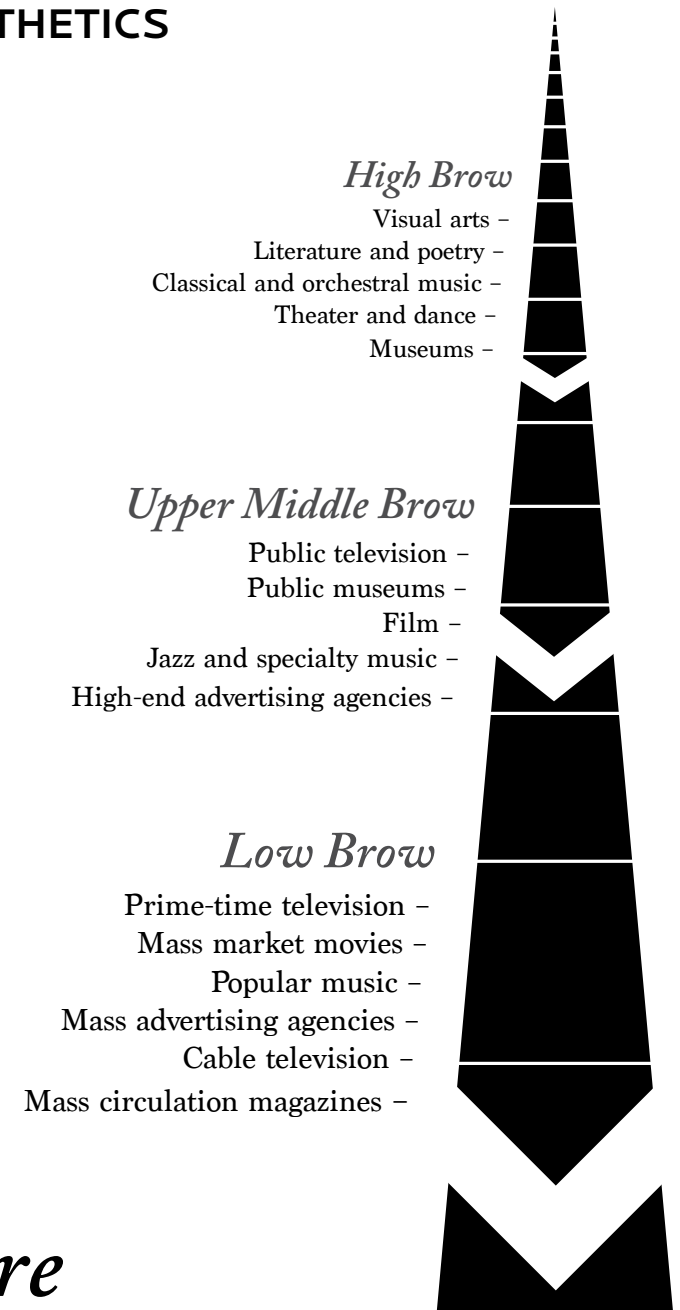


*for* MORALITY



*culture*  
**CHANGE**

*for* AESTHETICS



*culture*  
**CHANGE**

What are we to do to influence change in these cultural areas? Hunter calls us to "manifest faithful presence" where we are, with those we influence, and seek to develop leaders at places of the greatest effective influence in our culture. How do we do this?

## *Discover your calling*

God has a Kingdom assignment for every believer. He wants us to know his will even more than we want to know it. Below are some exercises intended to help you find and fulfill his purpose for your life.

### *Personal inventory*

Forbes magazine recently listed five questions that will help you identify your life mission. Take a moment to answer each:

(1) What would you be willing to do for free?

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(2) What are your primary interests?

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(3) What makes you mad?

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(4) What demographic do you connect to?

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(5) What would you regret?

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What have you learned from this exercise about your God-given calling?

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### *God-sized goals*

Robin Pou is an attorney, mediator, and executive coach. In conversations together, he has encouraged me to answer the following questions. I invite you to do the same:

What do you believe your life mission to be? Answer in a single sentence as briefly as possible.

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In fulfilling this mission, what are some God-sized goals for the next three to five years?

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What strengths do you bring to these goals? Write what comes to your mind, then ask a family member, colleague, and friend to do the same.

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What has this exercise taught you about your place of Kingdom influence?

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## *Identify your gifts*

God's supreme gift to us is himself. These spiritual "gifts" are means by which we can know our Father better and serve him more effectively. They are to the church what organs and body parts are to the human body. The study of these gifts is the study of the anatomy of the Church, the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are God's way of equipping and enabling us for our world mission and ministry. They are equipment necessary for service. They are bestowed on believers as the Spirit chooses (1 Cor. 12:11), not as we might wish. They are often given in accordance with natural talents, but always supersede them.

How do we know our gifts? How can we experience daily the power of the Spirit? We'll close our study by discussing the controversial questions people often ask about him: what are our spiritual gifts? What about "tongues"? What is the "baptism of the Spirit"? How can we be "filled with the Spirit"? Why should we be?

## *Who is gifted?*

The New Testament provides three lists of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4). Theologians have classified them as ministry of the word vs. practical ministry; and as motivational, ministering, and manifestational. One wrong classification is to group them in permanent and temporary categories. A good division: Ephesians 4 provides the orders of ministry given the church, while 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 list the gifts themselves.

Here are gifted people, according to Ephesians 4:11. First come "apostles." Their qualifications (1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:22; 14:4,7) are that they saw Jesus, were witnesses to the resurrected Christ, and were called by him to this function. The word means "delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders." The title came to include more than the original Twelve, as Paul makes clear in greeting Andronicus and Junias, two who are "outstanding among the apostles" (Ro. 16:7). Most theologians see the gift or office of "apostle" as one of introducing Christ and his gospel where it has never been preached, and leading churches to do the same.

The second office in Ephesians 4:11 is that of "prophet" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:10). These were both male and female (cf. Deborah and Miriam in the Old Testament, and Philip's four daughters who prophesied, Ac. 21:9). The emphasis of their ministry was on forth-telling more than fore-telling, though God occasionally gave them messages regarding the future as well as the present. "Evangelists" were the third office, individuals who founded churches as roving ministers. We are all to do the work of evangelism (2 Timothy 2:5), but some are especially gifted for bringing souls to salvation.

The fourth office in Ephesians 4:11 is the "pastor-teacher" ("pastor" and "teacher" in the Greek syntax are one function). They are responsible for protecting, shepherding, and teaching the people of God. They are to "feed and lead" the church of Jesus Christ.

Now we come to individual gifts. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; Eph. 4:7), given at his or her salvation. No believer has every spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:12, 27, 29-30). Our gifts differ from each other (Rom. 12:3-6a). We receive our gifts according to God's will, not our own desire or experience (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:7-8).

## *What are the "spiritual gifts"?*

Combining the various lists, we discover these gifts:

- *administration*: organizing people and ministries effectively
- *apostleship*: adapting to a different culture to share the gospel or do ministry
- *discernment*: distinguishing spiritual truth from error or heresy
- *evangelism*: sharing the gospel effectively and passionately
- *exhortation*: encouraging others as they follow Jesus
- *faith*: seeing God's plan and following it with passion
- *giving*: investing with unusual sacrifice and joy in God's Kingdom
- *healing*: being used by God to bring physical health in supernatural ways
- *intercession*: praying with unusual passion and effectiveness
- *interpretation of "tongues"*: being used by God to explain to others the message given by the Spirit through "tongues" (see below)
- *knowledge*: understanding and sharing the deep truths of God's word and will
- *leadership*: motivating and inspiring others to serve Jesus fully
- *mercy*: showing God's grace to hurting people with unusual passion
- *miracles*: being used by God in ministry which transcends natural explanation
- *prophecy*: preaching the word of God with personal passion and effectiveness
- *serving*: meeting practical needs with unusual sacrifice and joy
- *shepherding*: helping others grow spiritually
- *speaking in "tongues"*: using a God-given spiritual language in prayer and worship
- *teaching*: explaining God's word and truth with unusual effectiveness
- *wisdom*: relating biblical truth to practical life with great effectiveness

## *How can you know your gifts?*

Some believe that God reveals our spiritual gifts to us directly, as his Spirit speaks to us. Others depend on the insight and opinions of godly believers. Most theologians would add a third approach: give attention to your God-given opportunities for service, and to your interests, passions, and abilities. The Lord typically uses us in ways consistent with our gifting. For instance, if you are often asked into a leadership position, you may well be gifted for that role. The Lord usually gives us a desire to become involved in those ministries for which we are gifted. And he blesses the uses of our gifts, so that we can identify their existence by their effectiveness.

## **SPIRITUAL GIFT TEST**

I developed the following tool to help Christians identify their spiritual gifts. To use it, read each statement and then rate yourself based on your perception as to how true each statement is about yourself.

- 5 – Almost always true*
- 4 – Often true*
- 3 – Sometimes true*
- 2 – Seldom true*
- 1 – Almost never true*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. People often tell me that I am a good organizer of groups and committees.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Traveling and experiencing different cultures excites me.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. When I hear a sermon or Bible study, I seem to be able to tell when the speaker is teaching God's word and when he or she may be off track.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I get excited at the prospect of talking to someone about the gospel.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I look for ways to speak a positive word to people, especially when they are lonely or hurting.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I seem to be able to trust God in hard times, even when others struggle with their faith.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I enjoy contributing financially to the needs of others.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I have seen God heal people physically when I pray for them.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. When I hear about a need or problem, my first response is usually to pray.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I seem to have a gift for understanding what the Spirit is saying through those who speak in tongues.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I seem to have a gift for understanding what the Bible means by what it says.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I find great joy in helping a group of people define and achieve their goals.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I especially enjoy helping underprivileged people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. God often works supernaturally through my prayers and personal ministry.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I find great joy in proclaiming the word of God in public.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I am happiest when I work behind the scenes.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I have a deep desire to help other people become fully devoted followers of Jesus.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I find great joy in teaching the word of God to others.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. In my private prayers I am often led by the Spirit to pray in a language unknown to me.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. When I read the Bible, I can usually tell how it relates to our problems today.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. When I am part of a disorganized group, I become frustrated and want to help.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I seem to adapt to different languages and environments more easily than other people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I am very concerned about helping people distinguish spiritual truth from error.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I look for opportunities to share the gospel with people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I enjoy sending notes and cards to encourage people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. Others seem to be inspired by my strong faith.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I look for ways to invest my resources in the Kingdom of God.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. When I hear of a sick person I am especially drawn to pray for that person.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. Spending significant time in prayer is a very important part of my ministry.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I am drawn to worship services where tongues are used.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I especially enjoy studying the Bible and discovering its applications to life today.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. I become frustrated when a group does not have a clear purpose and strategy.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. My heart goes out to people who are suffering, and I want to do all I can to help them.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. I am drawn to ministries which enable me to pray for supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. I sense that the Holy Spirit uses me when I communicate his word in public.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. I don't seem to get as weary in doing tedious work as others.



- \_\_\_\_\_ 37. I would be willing to invest a significant amount of time in helping a small group of people grow closer to God.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 38. I sense that the Holy Spirit uses me when I teach his word to others.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 39. In public worship, I am often moved to declare a word from God in a language unknown to me or to the congregation.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 40. I seem to have a gift for finding biblical truth which meets the practical needs of others.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 41. I can often see the end from the beginning, and know what steps to take to accomplish a goal.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 42. I get excited at the thought of living in a different culture for the purpose of helping people follow Jesus.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 43. People often ask me to help them when they need to know the right thing to do.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 44. I am willing to take personal risks for the sake of sharing the gospel with others.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45. I have a strong desire to counsel hurting people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 46. I can consistently see the purpose of God in the circumstances of my life.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 47. I find great joy in knowing that my financial gifts will help other people follow Jesus.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 48. Other people are often led to ask me to pray for the sick.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 49. I find great joy in spending a significant amount of time in prayer.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 50. When I hear someone speak in tongues, God often reveals their message to me.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 51. Other people often ask me to help them understand the Bible.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 52. When I become involved in a group, its members often ask me to lead.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 53. I enjoy serving in hospitals, shelters, nursing homes, and benevolent ministries.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 54. People tell me that they have seen God act supernaturally in their lives through my ministry.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 55. When I speak in public, I seem to have a gift for connecting God's word to the needs of those who listen to me.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 56. I find joy in helping people meet their practical needs.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 57. When I join a group, I feel responsible for helping the other members grow spiritually.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 58. When I teach God's word, I seem to have a gift for connecting biblical truth to the lives of those who listen to me.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 59. I am drawn to congregations where tongues are welcomed in worship.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 60. In a group setting, others seem to look to me for counsel.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 61. People often ask me to help organize groups and accomplish goals.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 62. I would be willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of reaching people in different countries.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 63. My impressions of people's character and intentions are usually proven right.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 64. When I share my faith with people, they often seem to respond positively.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 65. People who have come to me for encouragement and comfort often tell me that I have helped them.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 66. When I find myself in difficult circumstances, I welcome them as an opportunity to watch God work.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 67. When I hear about a ministry opportunity, I get excited about the chance to contribute.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 68. Sick people often seek my intercession.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 69. People know of my personal commitment to prayer ministry, and often call on me to pray for them.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 70. Those who speak in tongues often turn to me for their interpretation.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 71. I enjoy writing and sharing the insights I have gained from my personal Bible study.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 72. I seem to have a gift for motivating and guiding groups of people to accomplish their goals.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 73. I am deeply concerned for those who are going through hard times.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 74. When I pray for a supernatural work of God, I can sense that the Spirit is using me.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 75. When I proclaim God's word in public, people tell me that they hear God speak to them through me.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 76. I feel that God wants me to help the church by meeting the practical and physical needs of others.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 77. I am very concerned about the spiritual maturity of those I know.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 78. People tell me that they hear God speak through me when I teach his word.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 79. I find great joy in declaring a revelation from God in an unknown tongue.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 80. When I have a problem, I can usually find the biblical wisdom I need.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 81. I enjoy to opportunities to use my organizational skills for God.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 82. I am drawn to opportunities to serve God in a different culture.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 83. I have learned to trust my intuition in knowing truth from falsehood.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 84. I am able to share my faith very naturally and easily.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 85. I am naturally able to find a way to comfort hurting people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 86. I am consistently confident that God's purpose will be fulfilled in my life and circumstances.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 87. I am drawn to opportunities where my financial resources can make a difference.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 88. I find special joy in helping those with physical needs.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 89. I am excited about spending time in prayer with other people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 90. During worship services, I am often asked to explain the meaning of a message delivered in tongues.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 91. I am drawn to ministries which enable me to share biblical truths I have discovered.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 92. When I lead a group, people affirm the effectiveness of my work.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 93. When I am involved in benevolent ministry, people affirm the effectiveness of my work.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 94. I find great joy in glorifying God by praying for a supernatural manifestation of the Spirit.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 95. I am drawn to opportunities to speak God's word in public.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 96. I enjoy serving God by meeting the routine needs of the church and her people.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 97. I am drawn to groups of people whom I can help to grow spiritually.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 98. I enjoy opportunities to teach God's word to others.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 99. People often tell me they hear God speak to them through my use of an unknown tongue.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 100. I am drawn to opportunities to help people solve their problems by discovering the biblical truth they need.

## SCORING

*Turn to the next page to score  
your spiritual gift profile.*

# Scoring

You can score your profile by putting your answer in the corresponding box and then totaling each category.

ADMINISTRATION	APOSTLESHIP	DISCERNMENT	EVANGELISM	EXHORTATION	FAITH	GIVING	HEALING	INTERCESSION	INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
21.	22.	23.	24.	25.	26.	27.	28.	29.	30.
41.	42.	43.	44.	45.	46.	47.	48.	49.	50.
61.	62.	63.	64.	65.	66.	67.	68.	69.	70.
81.	82.	83.	84.	85.	86.	87.	88.	89.	90.

*total* \_\_\_\_\_

KNOWLEDGE	LEADERSHIP	MERCY	MIRACLES	PROPHECY	SERVING	SHEPHERDING	TEACHING	SPEAKING IN TONGUES	WISDOM
11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.
31.	32.	33.	34.	35.	36.	37.	38.	39.	40.
51.	52.	53.	54.	55.	56.	57.	58.	59.	60.
71.	72.	73.	74.	75.	76.	77.	78.	79.	80.
91.	92.	93.	94.	95.	96.	97.	98.	99.	100.

Locate the names of the gifts with three highest numerical values. These are considered your primary gifts.

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*for reflection:*

In what ways could you employ your spiritual gifts in utilizing your influence for the Kingdom?

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## *Choose servant leadership*

Bernard Swain describes the four types of leadership:

- *Sovereign*: the leader determines both the vision and its implementation
- *Parallel*: the leader serves the organization as it seeks and fulfills its vision collectively
- *Mutual*: the leader serves as a member of a team which shares its duties and responsibilities
- *Semi-mutual*: the leader defines the vision and direction of the organization, then serves its members as they achieve that vision through their own initiatives and efforts.<sup>4</sup>

Our context requires and rewards a semi-mutual leadership style. Effective leaders know and define their passion and that of their organization, then serve and empower its members to fulfill that vision in a collective and collaborative spirit.

Oswald Sanders, in his now-classic *Spiritual Leadership*, claims that "true greatness, true leadership, is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you."<sup>5</sup> Max DePree, the former CEO of Herman Miller and author of bestselling leadership literature, defines leadership:

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.<sup>6</sup>

*for reflection:*

Would those you lead say that you serve them, or that they serve you? How will you become a more effective servant leader this week?

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## *Value personal integrity*

The leader's personal character is foundational to success in a culture which disparages positional authority. Sanders quotes the great military leader Bernard Montgomery: "Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence."<sup>7</sup> The second is essential to the first.

Warren Bennis is the University Professor and Distinguished Professor of Business Administration and Founding Chairman of The Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California. In 1976, he warned us about the "unconscious conspiracy" in every organization to maintain the status-quo for the future benefits of current participants. The solution is for leaders to empower their followers to fulfill the organization's collective vision for the benefit of its members and customers. To do so, leaders must embody four critical competencies:

- Management of attention
- Management of meaning
- Management of trust
- Management of self.<sup>8</sup>

In a culture which depreciates leadership by position, it is essential that we earn the right to lead by virtue of our personal character. We cannot ask people to do what we are unwilling to do, or go further than we are willing to lead. What the leader is, the organization becomes.

DePree cites Mahatma Gandhi's list of the seven sins in the world:

- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character



- Commerce without morality
- Science without humanity
- Worship without sacrifice
- Politics without principle.<sup>9</sup>

*for reflection:*

Because character is so central to effective leadership today, spiritual formation is now indispensable for leaders. If the members of your organization were as committed to personal integrity as you are, would that be good for your colleagues and customers? What steps can you take to strengthen your commitment to integrity this week?

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## *Maximize corporate influence*

"Never before has confidence in society's leaders been so low, and the challenges we face so great." So states Michael Lindsay, author of *View from the Top: An inside look at how people in power see and shape the world.*<sup>10</sup> How, then, are leaders to succeed in today's conflicted culture?

Dr. Lindsay interviewed 550 senior leaders over 10 years, including Presidents Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush and executives representing White House administrations from Johnson to Obama. He met with hundreds of CEOs and more than 200 nonprofit executives, including the heads of Harvard, Stanford, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and the American Red Cross. This is the largest study of its kind ever conducted.

Lindsay defines leadership as "the exercise of influence in the service of a shared cause." He is convinced that large institutions change the world, for better or for worse, and effective leaders take the helm of such organizations in order to cast a shadow far broader than their own. Lindsay agrees with Hugh Hecho that "lasting cultural change occurs through major organizations."<sup>11</sup>

## *What prepares a leader?*

According to Lindsay, all leaders begin with potential and opportunity. However, and this is good news for most of us, "it doesn't really matter what future leaders do before they're 20."<sup>12</sup>

A privileged childhood is actually a poor indicator of becoming a senior leader. Only nine percent of study participants identified themselves as coming from privilege, while 59 percent came from the middle class. Note, however, that most came from homes with two loving parents. Nearly two-thirds attended schools that are not considered elite institutions. Character, passion and perseverance are the keys to success, not status before adulthood.

Effective leaders typically master a particular skill set, but then they become generalists. Thirty-three percent of study participants were multilingual, compared to 26 percent of the general population. They learn as much as they can about as much of their organization as possible. In this sense, they embrace a liberal arts approach to life and leadership.

And relational intelligence is key—"interpersonally gifted people are at a significant advantage in power."<sup>13</sup>

How does one become a "platinum leader" (Lindsay's category for the most effective leaders)? The way up the ladder is through networked connections—knowing people who know people. Lindsay describes the White House Fellows as a premier example; those who spend a year in Washington networking with senior government officials find their career accelerated enormously. The Rhodes scholarship and grants and fellowships within specific disciplines help greatly as well. Mentoring chains are indispensable to personal and public progress. Elite networks help aspiring leaders become elite.

How do leaders succeed? Lindsay identifies three essentials: (1) being productive with time and energy; (2) motivating and managing people well; and (3) building an organizational culture that seeks human flourishing.

**Time:** two-thirds of the leaders interviewed begin their workday before 8:00, some starting as early as 4:30. Two-thirds sleep six hours a night or less. Their average workweek is 68 hours, with a range from 40 to 106 hours; three-fourths work seven days a week. But most make significant time for reflection and refocusing during the day.

**People:** effective leaders stay connected with all rungs of the employment ladder. Some manage by walking around; others schedule appointments to meet with representative employees from across the spectrum of the organization. They are consultative leaders, but not consensus-driven. They resist the narrowing of information that comes to those at the top.

**Culture:** effective leaders focus tirelessly on the flourishing of their company and all within its influence. Some focus specifically on safety, others on customer service, others on employee morale. But all define the vision of the organization and work nonstop to help others grasp and fulfill it together.

Nearly all (86 percent) say they work because they love their jobs. Apple chairman Arthur Levinson speaks for the group: "There's something deep-seated in my brain that does not allow me to live a casual life."<sup>14</sup>

*for reflection:*

Who is your mentor? Whom are you mentoring? Are there steps you can take to strengthen these relationships?

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To what degree would those you influence say that you seek their flourishing? Are there ways you can strengthen your commitment to their welfare?

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*Summary:*

In light of your personal inventory, God-sized goals, spiritual gifts, and commitment to servant leadership, personal integrity and corporate influence, how would you define your place of influence in God's Kingdom?

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## ENGAGE

*"Men who understood the times  
and knew what Israel should do"  
(1 Chronicles 12:32).*

Jesus called us to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). To be effective, salt must be dispensed and light uncovered. If we are to be culture-changing Christians, we must understand the culture we seek to change. Then we can be most effective in utilizing our God-given influence and equipping by the Spirit.

If you could solve one problem in America today, what would it be? A recent survey asked more than a million Americans that question. Their #1 answer was, "restoring national economic stability." That's no surprise, in these days of recession. But tying for #1, ahead of "preventing terrorism" and "curing cancer," was: "restoring values and morality to society."<sup>15</sup>

Are we right to be so concerned? Consider these facts:

- The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world.
- The Centers for Disease Control say that one-third of girls in America become pregnant before the age of 20; 81% of them are unmarried.
- Out of wedlock births accounted for four in ten of all U.S. births in 2007.
- 100,000 websites offer illegal child pornography, which generated \$3 billion annually.
- 90% of 8-16-year-olds have viewed porn online, most while doing their homework. There are 372,000,000 pornography pages on the Internet.
- Property theft in America costs us more than \$15 billion.
- Last year, more than 9.9 million Americans were victims of identity theft, our nation's fastest growing crime, at a cost of \$5 billion.
- In 2006 in the United States homicide was the second leading cause of death for infants. Homicide with a firearm was the second leading cause of persons between the ages of 10 and 24, the third leading cause of death for persons between ages 25 and 34.
- There were 774,000 gang members and 27,900 gangs reported active in the U.S. in 2008.
- Illegal drugs cost our country \$215 billion annually.
- Young adults are nine times more likely to have sex outside of marriage. They are six times more likely to lie. They are almost three times more likely to get drunk. They are twice as likely to view pornography.

How did we get here?

## *Postmodern relativism*

The answer in a word: relativism. This is the belief that all beliefs and assertions are equally valid. There's no such thing as "truth," just "your truth" and "my truth." "You have no right to force your beliefs on me" is conventional wisdom today. How did we come to such a view of truth?

The Reformation shook the foundations of medieval Catholic authority. In response, a mathematician named René Descartes (1596-1650), in a desire to argue for objective truth and his Catholic tradition, articulated a worldview based on pure rationalism and logical certainty. British empiricists such as Locke, Berkeley and Hume responded with the assertion that truth is known through the senses.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) synthesized the two, arguing that knowledge is produced when our minds interpret our sense data. However, Kant asserted, we cannot know the "thing in itself," only our experience of it. Knowledge is personal and subjective. "Postmodern" thinkers take this a step further, claiming that all truth claims are individual, personal, and subjective.

As a result, Christianity in the West has become a matter of personal preference, an activity reserved for our spare time, a belief structure we are welcome to possess but forbidden to impose on others. Non-Christians in our culture no longer view the church as relevant to their lives and needs. They are uninterested in our sermons and theological assertions. They see truth and morality as matters of personal preference, nothing more.

Is this issue relevant to our democracy?

Plato, one of the greatest minds in human history, was convinced that a democracy could not last. The people could be swayed too easily by public speakers, he warned. And once the people discovered that they could vote based on their personal interests rather than the good of the nation, their democracy would begin to fail.

In his farewell address (September 19, 1796), President George Washington told the nation: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports... Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle... Virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."

John Adams, our second president, claimed that "the general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity." He stated, "Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited. What a Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be."

Thomas Jefferson, our third president, was not a biblical Christian. He cut from the Bible every reference to the miraculous, and viewed Jesus as only a man. But he insisted, "Injustice in government undermines the foundations of a society. A nation, therefore, must take measures to encourage its members along the paths of justice and morality."

Founders knew that democracy requires morality, a basic insistence on character and integrity by the culture. Returning to such a conviction is essential to our survival and future as a nation.

*for reflection:*

Explain why ethical relativism is popular today. How would you respond to it?

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## *The "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) movement*

Cullen Murphy's well-reviewed *Are We Rome?* explores one of history's most debated subjects: why did Rome fall and does it matter? He notes striking similarities between the Roman Empire and America:

- Both built the most powerful military in their world, by far (America invests as much in military expenditures as the next 15 nations combined).
- The Roman road system, stretching some 53,000 miles, was about the length of the U.S. interstate system.
- The Roman Empire and its Mediterranean Sea would fit neatly inside America's Lower Forty-Eight states.
- Both cherish a glorious past and embrace a Manifest Destiny. Rome claimed to be an *imperium sine fine* (empire without end), while America's dollar bill proclaims a *novus ordo* (new order).

The most significant parallel, in my mind, is spiritual. Roman religion was transactional: place your offering on the altars of the gods so they will bless your crops and give you victory in battle. They adopted the Greek division between the soul and body, the "spiritual" and the "secular," "religion" and the "real world."

The Greeks said that the gods lived atop Mt. Olympus, far removed from life below. The Romans adopted their gods, renaming Zeus as Jupiter, Hera as Juno, Ares as Mars, and so forth. But they preserved this division between the gods and us.

They added emperor worship to their pantheon, but this was not out of any desire to foster an intimate, personal relationship with Caesar. It was a loyalty oath, another transaction. Burn a pinch of incense on the altar of Caesar and say "Caesar is lord," and you are given a certificate which makes you a legal Roman citizen for another year. Religion was like renewing your license or car registration, something you had to do.

When Christianity spread into this Roman world, it eventually adopted this spiritual schizophrenia between the "spiritual" and the "secular," this transactional religion. By AD 250 we separated the "clergy" from the "laity," the "spiritual" people from the "secular," making priests like those in Roman religion who could help us make our transactions with God. Then Constantine legalized the Church in AD 313 and we began constructing buildings like Roman temples where people could come to make their sacrifices and be blessed.

In the Modern Era we began measuring success by the size of our temples—our buildings and budgets and baptisms. In the Postmodern World we say that all truth is personal and subjective—it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you're tolerant of my beliefs and sincere in yours. You can worship Zeus while I worship Apollo or Athena or the emperor. Pay your dues for services received. A transactional religion, not a transforming relationship.

Unfortunately, many Americans have a Roman, transactional faith. If we come to church on Sunday, he'll bless us on Monday. If we pay our spiritual dues, we'll receive the result of our investment. We have compartments in our lives, with God here and the rest of life there. We do this with our time and money and relationships. C. S. Lewis says we're like honest people who pay our taxes but certainly hope there will be money left over for us to do what we want.

This worldview shift leads to "spiritual but not religious" movement, which claims 100 million members worldwide. Actually, far more apparently agree with this position. In Western Europe:

- UK: 37% believe there is a God / 33% believe in a "life force" / 25% are atheists
- Finland: 33% believe there is a God / 42% believe in a "life force" / 22% are atheists
- Denmark: 28% believe there is a God / 47% believe in a "life force" / 24% are atheists
- Netherlands: 28% believe there is a God / 39% believe in a "life force" / 30% are atheists
- Norway: 22% believe there is a God / 44% believe in a "life force" / 29% are atheists
- Sweden: 18% believe there is a God / 45% believe in a "life force" / 34% are atheists
- Czech Republic: 16% believe there is a God / 44% believe in a "life force" / 37% are atheists
- France: 27% believe there is a God / 27% believe in a "life force" / 40% are atheists

In America, according to Gallup, one in three Americans self-identify with this group. This would constitute 100 million SBNR just in America.

*for reflection:*

Explain why the "spiritual but not religious" movement is growing in popularity today. How would you respond to it?

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## *"Religion is dangerous"*

In 2010, Roman Catholic Cardinal Francis George of Chicago stated: "I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history."

Attacks on religious freedom are making the news more and more these days. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo recently claimed that "extreme conservatives who are right-to life, pro-assault weapon, anti-gay...have no place in the State of New York."

One scholar estimates that 90 percent of all people killed around the world because of their religious beliefs are Christians. Now we're seeing a rising tide of oppression in the West as well. There was a day when the church was central to the culture—stores were closed on Sundays and political leaders almost always identified publicly with a church. In the 1960s, the church started becoming marginalized—God is not our King but our hobby.

Now the church is being attacked as dangerous to society. The United Nations recently called on the Catholic Church to change its long-standing positions on abortion, homosexuality and contraception, claiming that these doctrines are harmful to the public. Richard Dawkins claims that "religion is the root of all evil." Christopher Hitchens claimed that religion "poisons everything." Seven in 10 Protestant pastors now believe that "religious liberty is on the decline in America."

*for reflection:*

Have you experienced opposition to your faith? If so, where and how? Do you believe animosity against the gospel to be growing today? Why or why not?

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## *Reading the culture*

Acts 17 finds Paul in Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him from Berea. Luke picks up the story:

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:16-23).

*How did Paul connect with his culture?*

**FIRST**

He cared for those who needed salvation: "he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (v. 16). This was the example of Jesus:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt. 9:35-38).

Ken Medema, the Christian singer and composer, has a line in one of his songs that says, "Don't tell me I have a friend in Jesus until you show me I have a friend in you."

**SECOND**

Paul investigated the culture: "Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD'" (vs. 22-23).

What are our objects of worship today? What is popular, interesting, making money? Why?

For windows to the culture, I recommend reading the following newspaper columnists and bloggers: Ross Douthat, David Brooks, E.J. Dionne, Chris Cillizza, Jonathan Merritt, W. Bradford Wilcox, Robert P. George, George Will, and Gail Collins.

It is important to identify the most popular movies, television shows, and music. What does their popularity say about our culture? For example, consider the top ten movies for 2014 in box office sales:

1. Guardians of the Galaxy
2. The Hunger Games: Mockingjay—Part 1
3. Captain America: The Winter Soldier
4. The LEGO Movie
5. Transformers: Age of Extinction
6. Maleficent
7. X-Men: Days of Future Past
8. The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies
9. Big Hero 6
10. Dawn of the Planet of the Apes

Note that each was based on a cartoon, sci-fi, or fantasy character. What does such escapism say about our culture?

Current events journals are also vital in interpreting the times. I recommend:

- Foreign Affairs
- World Affairs
- The American Interest
- Periodicals: Time, Newsweek, etc.
- Stratfor
- Chronicle on Higher Education
- The Economist
- The Atlantic
- iD
- The New Yorker

**THIRD**

Paul dialogued with thought leaders: "He reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him...Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said..." (Acts 17:17-18, 22).

Who corresponds to these influencers in your community? What local political and cultural leaders could you know? Authors, editors, national and local figures of prominence? Leaders in your congregation? Such people are often more open to conversation and relationship than you might expect. As you reach out to them, God will give you opportunity to learn from the culture through their wisdom, and to influence them for the gospel as well.

*for reflection:*

What cultural and current events resources do you read? Which will you investigate this week?

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Name cultural influencers in your community. How will you reach out to them?

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## *Engaging the culture*

In 1951, Richard Niebuhr published the best-known classic in the field, a work titled *Christ and Culture*.<sup>16</sup> It was my textbook in biblical ethics; it is still considered fundamental and foundational to the discipline today. Niebuhr sketches the five ways Christians can relate their faith to their society and culture. Let's review them briefly.

### **ONE:** *Christ against culture*

This model argues that we must reject the fallen world in every way, that we must have as little engagement with it as possible. We are to have nothing to do with the cultural issues of the day. The Incarnation seems to give the lie to this approach. If the physical world is inherently fallen, how could Jesus have remained sinless while inhabiting flesh?

### **TWO:** *Christ of culture*

This model attempts to integrate the world and the word of God, the culture and the Christian faith. It blurs the distinction between the two, and adopts the prevailing culture as the way to understand the faith. Whatever the culture adopts will be adapted by the faith as well. The Great Commission gives the lie to this approach. Why "go and make disciples of all nations" if the nations do not need to be evangelized and disciplined?

### **THREE:** *Christ above culture*

This approach teaches that we live in two worlds, the spiritual and the secular, and we must give each its due. The one is not the other. However, the great problem with this approach is the sinfulness of humanity. This model does not do enough to transform the culture it seeks to help. It lives in Sunday and Monday without seeking to bring Sunday to Monday.

### **FOUR:** *Christ and culture in paradox*

This approach rejects the third by arguing that culture is so inherently sinful as to be beyond saving. Yet it contradicts the first (Christ against culture) by arguing that we must try. We must preach grace to law, the gospel to the lost. We respond to the issues of our culture by preaching the gospel of salvation, for only when souls change can the world change. The problem with this approach is that it does not speak to issues the Bible itself addresses, such as the treatment of the poor. It is not a holistic worldview as are the Scriptures.

### **FIVE:** *Christ transforming culture*

This model seeks to bring the biblical worldview to bear on every dimension of society for the purpose of redeeming the culture for the Kingdom. Unlike the first model, it does not ignore the culture; unlike the second, it does not adopt it; unlike the third, it does not separate the two realms; unlike the fourth, it seeks the salvation of souls but also the transformation of society. It would seek to apply biblical truth to cultural issues for the sake of advancing the Kingdom of God on earth.

One challenge this model faces is the difficulty of keeping salvation issues primary. It is easier to deal with social issues as ends rather than as means to the end of eternal souls and significance.

#### *for reflection:*

Describe a situation where each model is appropriate. For instance, Christ against culture would counsel a Christian not to view pornography, even with the motivation to reach out to those involved in that industry.

#### *Christ against culture*

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#### *Christ of culture*

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*Christ above culture*

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*Christ and culture in paradox*

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*Christ transforming culture*

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What steps will you take to be salt and light this week?

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*conclusion:*

## **PUTTING THE GOSPEL INTO PRACTICE**

John Haggai is founder of the Haggai Institute and a long-time friend and mentor. His most famous edict, repeated by leaders around the world, is simple but profound: "Attempt something for God so great it is doomed to fail unless God be in it."

It may seem that changing a culture as post-Christian as ours is impossible. And it is, in human ability. Human words cannot change human hearts. You and I cannot convict a single sinner of a single sin, or save a single soul.

But God's Spirit can do what we cannot. The first Christians were committed to being salt and light in their culture, and by Acts 17 they had "turned the world upside down" (v. 6, KJV). What God is doing in nations around the world, he longs to do in our culture. But he is waiting for believers who are willing to be instruments for moral and spiritual renewal before it's too late.

Changing the culture begins with us. We must be the change we seek. Changed people change the world. When we are **equipped** through salvation, spiritual surrender, and continued transformation, we become the hands and feet of Jesus in our world. When we define our **influence** through personal inventory, spiritual gifts analysis, and commitment to leadership that serves with integrity, God uses us to touch lives with the gospel. When we **engage** our culture as change agents for the Kingdom, God extends his Kingdom through us.

As you commit your life to culture-changing Christianity, be encouraged: we cannot measure the eternal significance of present faithfulness. Alfred North Whitehead was right: great people plant trees they'll never sit under.

Years ago I heard a challenging sermon on the time Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-16). The pastor noted: When we stand before God in heaven, he will not ask about our title—but he will examine our towel.

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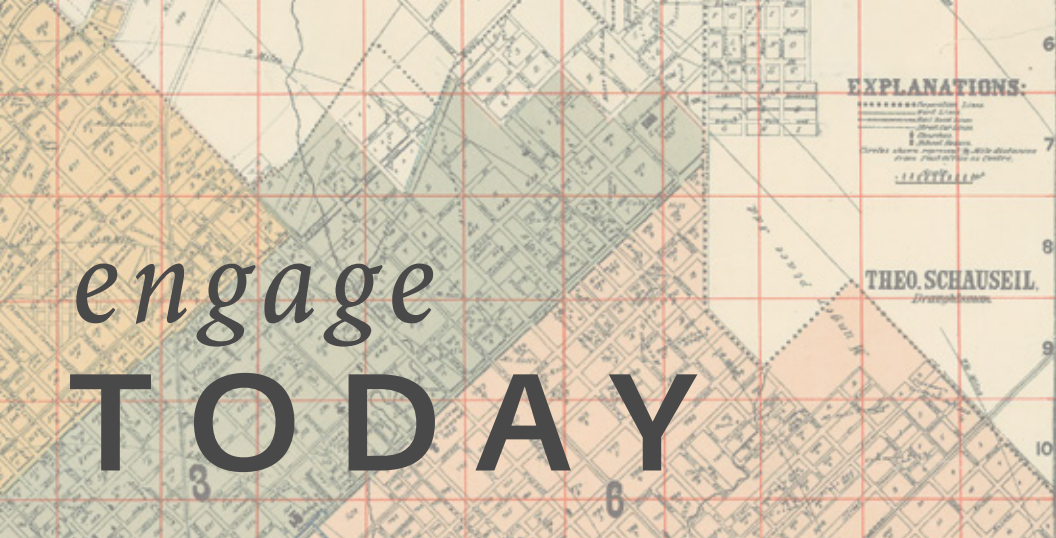
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## ABOUT THE DENISON FORUM

The Denison Forum on Truth and Culture (DFTC), founded by Dr. Jim Denison in 2009, equips Christians to use their influence to change their culture. DFTC promotes spiritual formation and advances biblical thinking on cultural issues. As a catalyst for moral and spiritual renewal, DFTC is joining God in building a global movement of culture-changing Christians. The ministry provides compelling perspectives on culture to a modern generation in search of moral truth. By utilizing the web, social media, print literature, radio, and speaking events, DFTC is bridging the gap between faith and culture. Dr. Denison writes a cultural commentary available at [denisonforum.org](http://denisonforum.org). His free daily commentary is distributed around the world to over 90,000 subscribers in 203 countries.







*engage*  
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