

# UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE

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# UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE

A SURVEY OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

JEFF MYERS

UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE

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Jeff Myers, PhD, President  
Summit Ministries

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# PREFACE

## *How to Use the Summit Worldview Library*

Noted Christian writer and teacher Del Tackett has said that the Summit Worldview Library needs to be the core in every high school, college, and seminary today. Colson Center president John Stonestreet has said that this series should have a place in every Christian's home library. Why is this series so important for Christian students and adults in all walks of life to use often in today's complex world? Perhaps seeing how the trilogy came together will help explain:

- ***Understanding the Faith: A Survey of Christian Apologetics*—the first book in the series enables Christians to better understand theology and apologetics.** *Understanding the Faith* is a fast-track, fast-paced theological education for those who want to understand God and his world in a profound way and share their faith intelligently with unbelievers. Theology and apologetics aren't just academic exercises for pastors and church leaders; we are all "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) charged with giving "reason[s] for the hope" we have in him (1 Pet. 3:15). Pressing questions about life and faith deserve thoughtful answers.
- ***Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews*—the second book in the series gives Christians insight into the battle other worldviews are waging against Christ and inspires newfound confidence in the breadth and depth of a biblical Christian worldview.** By providing trusted, documented insight into the six major worldviews that drive the global events of our day, *Understanding the Times* helps Christians "[understand] the times" in which they live so they can know what to do in response to the critical issues they're facing today (1 Chron. 12:32).
- ***Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement*—the third book in the series shows Christians how to transform culture.** With a firm foundation in biblical theology, apologetics, and worldview, Christians have something vital to say about every significant issue of our day. The depth and creativity of Christian thought on today's events should inspire tremendous confidence in communicating biblical truth to friends, loved ones, and associates. In John 8:32, Jesus said we can "know the truth, and the truth will set [us] free." Entire nations are in bondage to bad ideas, but believers can proclaim the truth—boldly, intelligently, and practically—that can set people free.

As a result, the Summit Worldview Library is eminently useful for students, teachers, pastors, businesspeople, public leaders, and others who want their faith to make an impact on twenty-first-century society.



*CHAPTER* 1

# *1*

## *INTRODUCTION*

### **1. LIFE IS MORE THAN RAISIN RUGBY**

Job 12:7 says, “Ask the beasts, and they will teach you.” As odd as it seems, I once learned an important life lesson from chickens. Several years ago my wife and I purchased a home in the country. Naturally, we decided to get chickens. We didn’t expect them to arrive in the mail, but they did—via a package about the size of a frozen dinner.

Housed in a box in our laundry room, the chicks provided endless hours of entertainment for our children. One day while fixing lunch, I heard an unbelievable racket emanating from the laundry room. Rushing in, I found my two-year-old daughter dropping raisins into the box. One chick discovered a raisin,

grabbed it in his beak, and bolted. The others gave chase. Another stole the raisin and lit out, his fellows in hot pursuit.

*Wow, raisin rugby, I thought.*

Then I realized my daughter had actually dropped a *handful* of raisins into the box, more than enough for each chick to have one. Yet none of them noticed, consumed as they were with competing fiercely for that first raisin. These chicks couldn't contemplate abundance, even with raisins raining down on them. They had only one thought in their raisin-sized brains: others have it; I want it; I must take it.

We aren't as different from these chicks as we might like to think. Since the fall of humanity, we tend to be takers, not givers. God, on the other hand, gives generously. One of the first things Scripture reveals about him, in fact, is how he desired the abundance and flourishing of humans and the world. He equipped us to be fruitful and bring joy to his creation and one another. Tragically, like those rugby chickens, our first parents chose to be stingy, jealous, and selfish. Humanity has followed suit ever since.

In God's offer of redemption, however, we're given another chance. Christ provides the grace and opportunity to have our identities changed back from being takers to being the givers he created us to be. When that happens to individuals, communities, and even nations, cultures are transformed for the good.

**Christ provides the grace and opportunity to have our identities changed back from being takers to being the givers he created us to be.**

*Understanding the Culture* is the third book in a trilogy. In book 1, *Understanding the Faith*, we got to know who God is based on the Bible, and what his plan for the world looks like. In book 2, *Understanding the Times*, we grappled with how the biblical Christian worldview compares to other prominent worldviews, and in so doing, we found it to be more intelligible, reasonable, and livable than the other philosophies of our age.

In this book, we turn our attention to the needs of the world around us and ask whether the Bible really speaks to the pressing issues of our age. You will *not* find in these pages a manual with clever plans for saving humanity. It's actually the opposite. This book is an invitation to stop playing God and start engaging the world around us based on his intended design for it and for us. It isn't enough to merely start caring. We must care *well*.

Most people are concerned about what is going on in the world around them, or at least they say they are. But the form our caring takes betrays what we really believe. If the homeless ask us for money, do we give it and drive away, do we give them a meal, do we engage them in a conversation about what they really need, do we refer them to a homeless shelter, or do we walk away and in the next election vote for a government-entitlement program to help the poor?

Ideas have consequences because we act on them. We all live based on what we believe to be true. Christians must act on biblical ideas not just in our personal conduct but also in the big issues of our day, such as life, marriage, military force, the economy, and justice.

As we seek to make a difference, we're standing on the shoulders of giants. It's hard to imagine where our world would be today without Christians applying biblical ideas over the centuries. The question we face is this: Are such ideas still relevant? We can agree that Christians ought to be nice people. If you met a group of young men in a dark alley, for

example, it ought to make a difference if they were coming from a Bible study.<sup>1</sup> But does this suggest that we ought to apply the Bible's teachings at a cultural level? Should we *try* to shape culture? Should society put up with our trying to do so?

If the primary identifying characteristic of Christians is pleasantness, then being nice ought to be the primary goal of our lives. But if what the Bible reveals about why we're here on this planet is actually true, then being caring people is much more than smiling and checking boxes on a do-gooder list. Rather, Christian caring ought to be the very best kind of caring. It ought to unleash human ingenuity. It ought to point the way for people to be reconciled to God. It ought to restore people to a high capacity of bearing God's image. It ought to bring glory to the Creator. So how does Christian caring start?

**Christian caring ought to be the very best kind of caring. It ought to restore people to a high capacity of bearing God's image.**

## **2. CHRISTIAN CARING STARTS WITH GOOD DECISIONS**

All cultures, including ours, are products of people's decisions, both good and bad. Jim Clifton, chairman and CEO of Gallup, argues that people make between ten and twenty thousand small decisions a day. Multiply this by the US population, and people make an estimated *quadrillion* decisions (that's a one followed by fifteen zeros) every year in America alone.<sup>2</sup> Our personal legacy is the sum of our decisions over a lifetime. By extension, our *cultural* legacy results from the interaction of everyone's decisions.

Our decisions have an enormous influence. Think about what you're doing right now: reading a book. Books influence the world largely because a man named Johannes Gutenberg had ideas about their importance. He acted on those ideas by inventing a printing system that used movable type to rapidly reproduce words on the printed page. His innovations changed the world.

Gutenberg's genius as an inventor was just the beginning of the story. Gutenberg saw printing as a means of rapidly spreading God's truth. He hoped that the printing press would "win every soul that comes into the world by her word no longer written at great expense by hands easily palsied, but multiplied like the wind by an untiring machine."<sup>3</sup>

Because Gutenberg's press was based on the design of wine presses he had seen in his region of Germany, wine became his figure of speech for the impact he hoped his invention would have:

Yes ... it is a press, certainly, but a press from which shall flow in inexhaustible streams the most abundant and most marvellous liquor that has ever flowed to relieve the thirst of men! Through it, God will spread his Word. A spring of pure truth shall flow from it: like a new star it shall scatter the darkness of ignorance and cause a light hithertofore unknown to shine amongst men.<sup>4</sup>

Think of it. A few modifications to a wine press enabled ideas to be disseminated rapidly. It dramatically changed learning and made it nearly impossible to suppress viewpoints those in power didn't like. No wonder Gutenberg has been named "man of the millennium."<sup>5</sup> The

book you hold in front of you is a direct result of one man's invention. The ready availability of the written word is still changing the world.

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Many people today no longer read the printed page but use computer devices of some sort, like tablets or smartphones. In their most basic form, computers are nothing but complex arrangements of glass, plastic, silicone, and various metals. Every part comes from the earth, from sand on the seashore to minerals found deep underground. Without mining, oil exploration, information theory, engineering, intricate manufacturing systems, and a well-developed system of economic exchange, we might very well be scratching drawings on a cave wall, not texting on smartphones.

As it is, the spread of ideas enabled by technology continues to grow by leaps and bounds. The computing power in your cell phone is more than NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) possessed when *Apollo* landed on the moon in 1969. That microchip hidden in the musical greeting card you got on your birthday has more computing power than all the Allied forces in World War II possessed in 1945. Your PlayStation or Xbox contains more computing power than a multi-million-dollar military supercomputer in 1997.<sup>6</sup>

The real genius of technology is its ability to extend power to those who, without it, would have no power at all. People now use handheld devices to exchange money, run businesses, and even deploy social media in revolt against undemocratic regimes. Without millions of decisions from people all over the world, you wouldn't be reading right now. You probably wouldn't even know how to read. You might not even have lived past infancy.

Clearly, we must learn to make good decisions about the natural world, technology, economics, and so forth. Christian caring starts with good decisions, but that's not the whole picture. In fact, if we just focus on good decision making, we'll miss the picture entirely.

### **3. CHRISTIAN CARING STARTS WITH SEEING THE BIG PICTURE**

As we've seen, good decisions can lead to good results. But bad decisions have an impact as well. People can use perfectly good computers to destroy the dignity and reputations of others, enable more efficient traffic in illegal drugs, or disseminate child pornography. One or two isolated bad decisions probably won't hurt much. Eating a whole bag of potato chips won't really hurt either, unless it becomes a daily habit. Over time, though, patterns emerge that move us like a swift river current. For a while we make our decisions, but inevitably our decisions begin making us. As the prophet Joel cried out, "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). Decisions matter.

Perhaps you've wondered about the impact your decisions have. Is it possible to somehow rise above your circumstances and gain a fuller sense of what your life means?

Entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson thinks he knows how to help you do it, and as long as you're willing to pay \$250,000, you can sign up to ride in one of his Virgin Galactic spaceships for a six-minute view of Earth from sixty-eight miles above its surface.<sup>7</sup> Justin Bieber, Ashton Kutcher, and Paris Hilton are among nearly seven hundred people who have purchased tickets

as of this writing and await the day when Virgin Galactic completes testing and begins passenger flights.<sup>8</sup>

On their trip aboard a Virgin Galactic spaceship, the lucky few will be strapped in a specially designed aircraft and propelled to an altitude of fifty thousand feet. According to Virgin Galactic, once released from the “mother ship,” there is a “brief moment of quiet” followed by “a wave of unimaginable but controlled power.” And then

you are instantly pinned back into your seat, overwhelmed but enthralled by the howl of the rocket motor and the eye-watering acceleration which, as you watch the read-out, has you traveling in a matter of seconds, at almost 3000 mph, 4 times the speed of sound. As you hurtle through the edges of the atmosphere, the large windows show the cobalt blue sky turning to mauve and indigo and finally to black. You’re on a high, this is really happening, you’re loving it.... The rocket motor has been switched off and it is quiet. But it’s not just quiet, it’s QUIET.... What’s really getting your senses screaming now though, is that the gravity which has dominated every movement you’ve made since the day you were born is not there any more.... After a graceful mid-space summersault you find yourself at a large window and what you see ... is a view that you’ve seen in countless images but the reality is so much more beautiful ... and produces emotions that are strong but hard to define. The blue map, curving into the black distance is familiar but has none of the usual marked boundaries. The incredibly narrow ribbon of atmosphere looks worryingly fragile. What you are looking at is the source of everything it means to be human, and it is home.<sup>9</sup>

As a Virgin Galactic customer, you’ll briefly glimpse something only 555 humans have seen prior to the advent of commercial space travel: continents, oceans, and the blue tint of the earth’s atmosphere.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, some people are signing up for the thrill because they have excess wealth. According to Virgin Galactic’s website, though, the company’s mission eclipses mere thrill seeking or luxury travel. It provides a window into what is really important in life. “We think it will be actually something of a transformative experience,” says Virgin Galactic CEO George Whitesides. “Once the engine shuts off, the cabin will be devoid of any mechanical noise from the inside and any atmospheric sound from the outside, so people will be able to make a deep and organic connection with the universe and the planet. It should be an extraordinary moment.”<sup>11</sup>

Maybe the visionaries behind Virgin Galactic genuinely think space travel as a consciousness-raising experience will improve lives. Or perhaps their sales pitch seeks to make customers feel less guilty about spending \$250,000 on a six-minute experience rather than using that money to improve the lives and situations of starving and destitute people here on Earth. What you think the big picture is makes all the difference in the world.

For many of the first astronauts, seeing Earth from space resulted in something much more than a “connection with the universe and the planet.” Colonel Jim

**What you think the big picture is makes all the difference in the world.**

Irwin, one of only twelve men to actually land and walk on the moon's surface, said of his experience, "I felt the power of God as I'd never felt it before."<sup>12</sup> For Irwin, seeing the earth from space turned his thoughts not toward creation's fragility but toward the majesty of the creator.

#### **4. CHRISTIAN CARING STARTS WITH WHAT GOD CARES ABOUT—PEOPLE**

From a biblical perspective, people are at the heart of what God cares about. The earth's atmosphere, the majesty of the oceans, and the beauty of the landscape take on significance because of God's image bearers. People matter most in a biblical worldview. To many, though, this kind of talk is pure folly. Edwin A. Burt, an American philosopher who grew up as the son of missionaries to China and later rejected his faith, said gloomily, "The ultimate accommodation necessary in a wise plan of life is acceptance of a world not made for man, owing him nothing, and in its major processes quite beyond his control."<sup>13</sup>

Was Burt right? Is there no plan behind creation? You might be surprised at how many scientists disagree with him and hold that some intelligent force fine-tuned the universe to contain all the properties that make intelligent life inevitable. As Albert Einstein affirmed, "The harmony of natural law ... reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."<sup>14</sup>

Embracing the **anthropic principle** (*anthro* means "pertaining to humanity"), many scientists argue that we can observe the universe only because it exists in a way that allows us as observers to exist. Robert Jastrow, an agnostic astrophysicist instrumental in NASA's development, wrote, "The anthropic principle is the most interesting development next to the proof of the creation, and it is even more interesting because it seems to say that science itself has proven, as a hard fact, that this universe was made, was designed, for man to live in. It's a very theistic result."<sup>15</sup>

If Einstein was right that there is intelligence behind the universe, and if Jastrow was right that the universe is the way it is so that humanity can exist, then any view of the world that diminishes the importance of people is missing the most important fact about our existence here.

Understanding that importance isn't always easy, of course. In some ways, being unable to see people from space would be a relief. We wouldn't be confronted with starvation or crime or abuse. We wouldn't feel the pain of watching those we care about undergoing chemotherapy or cowering in fear as mortar shells screamed overhead. But we wouldn't see the majesty of humanity either—the joy of seeing the smile on a child's face, the thrill of watching a couple fall in love or a son or daughter receive an acceptance letter from college, or the exhilaration of hearing that a loved one has overcome a long-held fear.

**People matter most in a biblical worldview.**

***Anthropic Principle:* the theory that the universe contains all the necessary properties that make the existence of intelligent life inevitable.**



The biblical witness is that people are made in the image of God and are central to his plan. This changes what we care about and why. We still care about the planet not because we see humans as a cancer but because focusing on people is to care about what God cares about.

## 5. WHY WE SHOULD CARE ABOUT WHAT GOD CARES ABOUT

If there truly is a God who has always existed, and who at specific points in time created matter and the universe, then it is reasonable to ask why our creator made us.

As we've seen in the previous books in this series, Christianity is intellectually sound. There is strong evidence that the universe is a product of design, that the Bible accurately reveals who this designer is, and that it points us to how we might come to know him. In this book, we'll see that once these and other biblical ideas took hold, the world rapidly began to change for the better.

Up until a couple of hundred years ago, life went on as it had for millennia. Widespread poverty reigned well into the eighteenth century. Deplorable working conditions, starvation, and disease were part of life for most people. Then something changed, and quickly. The amount of wealth in the world increased rapidly, as did the standard of living, safety, and health of people around the world. It wasn't "accidental or a matter of luck," author Sylvia Nasar points out, "but the result of human intention, will, and knowledge."<sup>16</sup>

What economist Cleon Skousen referred to as the "5,000-year leap" dramatically improved conditions for humanity, advancing people toward prosperity more in the past two hundred years than in the previous five thousand.<sup>17</sup> Today's US economy is thirty times bigger than it was two hundred years ago.<sup>18</sup> Prosperity is spreading, and people around the world are rapidly being lifted out of poverty. According to the World Bank, extreme poverty has dropped in half just in the last generation, from 36 percent of the world's population to 18 percent.<sup>19</sup>

We don't have to go into outer space to see what has happened and why. Beyond the bustle of daily life, something really important is going on in the human race. Every religious tradition has explanations for it, for how we got here and what we ought to do. Some say it's because of enlightened thinking. Others say it's because of revolution against illicit power. Still others say it's because we're achieving higher consciousness.

Yet few worldviews can account fully for the dark side of progress as well. While we gain the ability to alleviate suffering and pursue stability for unprecedented numbers of people, humanity has also developed unprecedented means of destroying itself. If we want to account for all of reality, we must not ignore this. We need to know what is really real.

When people talk about the nature of reality, they're engaging in an area of study philosophers call **metaphysics**. In Greek, the word *metaphysics* means "beyond the natural things" (*meta* means "beyond"; *physics* means "natural things"). In grappling with what is ultimately

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real, people tend to ask five questions. We analyzed these questions in the first two books in this trilogy, but they're worth reviewing briefly here:

**Metaphysics: the branch of philosophy that seeks to understand the nature of ultimate reality.**

**1. Origin. Where did we come from?** Some say God created us to bear his image. Others say humans evolved through random-chance processes. And there are many more views as well. They can't all be right, but which are wrong?

**2. Identity. Who are we?** What is a human being? Does every human being have intrinsic worth and dignity, or are worth and dignity determined by external factors, skills, and attributes? And if there is something wrong with us, what is it and how do we fix it?

**3. Meaning. What is real and true, and how do we know?** What is life all about? Is there purpose to our lives, or must we contrive it somehow? Is reality real or an illusion? Why do humans not only exist but also wonder about why they exist?

**4. Morality. How should we live?** Are there rules for the good life? Who makes them? Are they true for all times and all cultures, or do they depend on our circumstances? Is morality based on feelings? Does morality change if our feelings change?

**5. Destiny. What happens next?** Where is history headed? Is there an afterlife? How do we explain what is wrong with the world—the poverty, injustice, pain, and sickness? Should we try to fix things or merely look forward to a life beyond this one?

These five questions are ultimate in the sense that everyone answers them, if not with their minds, then by the way they live. Their answers form their **worldview**.

**Everyone answers these ultimate questions, if not with their minds, then by the way they live. Their answers form their worldview.**

Even among those who believe the Bible, differing answers can lead to cultural conflict (the Reformation, for example). One such conflict took place in the twentieth century between varying groups of Christians based on specific theological understandings. It so shaped the way Christians today think about cultural engagement that it would be hard for us to answer the question about how Christians should be involved in society without first understanding what transpired.

## **6. THE CONTROVERSY: FUNDAMENTALISM VERSUS LIBERALISM**

When Shane Claiborne walks onstage, the audience sees a skinny white guy with dreadlocks and a dry sense of humor and hears his message about separating from society. "Jesus taught that his followers ... should not attempt to 'run the world,'" he says.<sup>20</sup> For Claiborne, Christians are citizens of heaven alone. We should have no allegiance to an earthly kingdom. The best we can do is form an alternative, a community that's attractive enough to make people want to join us.

In short, reform is hopeless. It's time to bail out.

Claiborne's approach may be new, but his message is not. More than one hundred years ago, a prominent evangelist named Dwight L. Moody explained his message as follows: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life-boat, and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'"<sup>21</sup> The world is passing away, Moody thought, and nothing is of ultimate value except ensuring that people go to heaven when they die. As brilliant and innovative as Moody was, his view was certainly not the way the majority of Christians in history saw it. How did this kind of thinking come about?

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was widespread concern that American Protestantism was becoming liberal. America's greatest universities, founded largely as Christian institutions, were being run by people who denied doctrines such as the holiness of God, the divinity of Christ, and the truth of the Scriptures. Fanning these flames, a New York City pastor named Walter Rauschenbusch published *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, which defined *sin* as "selfishness" and implied that salvation would come by ushering in the kingdom of God through good works that changed society.<sup>22</sup>

Rauschenbusch openly identified himself as a socialist, which inevitably caused concern that he had rejected biblical orthodoxy and embraced Darwinian evolution and communism. The reaction was immediate and intense. If this new **social gospel** was in any way replacing the true gospel, there were a good many Christians who wanted to stay far away from it. It wasn't that they didn't care about the culture—many of them were politically active, such as social-reform-minded Democrats William Jennings Bryan, three-time candidate for president, and William Bell Riley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Minneapolis, and founder of what is now the University of Northwestern, where Billy Graham got his start.

Rather, many thought Rauschenbusch and others like him were offering a false form of salvation. In response, theology professors A. C. Dixon and R. A. Torrey decided to set forth what they saw as the basic principles of Christianity in a series of twelve volumes titled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*. A wealthy businessman named Lyman Stewart funded the series, and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (B.I.O.L.A., now called Biola University) published it.<sup>23</sup> Well-known theologians of the time, including James Orr, B. B. Warfield, and C. I. Scofield, wrote featured essays, and copies were distributed free to pastors, missionaries, and Christian educators.

Out of the publication of *The Fundamentals* rose a new movement, **fundamentalism**, which George Marsden defined as "militantly anti-modernist evangelicalism."<sup>24</sup> Fundamentalists strongly sensed a responsibility

The world is passing away, Moody thought, and nothing is of ultimate value except ensuring that people go to heaven when they die.

*Social Gospel*: a late eighteenth-century, early nineteenth-century postmillennial movement popular among liberal Protestants that sought to eradicate social evils like poverty and racism in the belief that this would usher in the second coming of Christ.

to bring maturity to the American theological landscape and also, in some senses, to be the “older brother” who helped American culture avoid self-destruction.

***Fundamentalism:*** an early twentieth-century Protestant movement that sought to defend orthodox Christianity against the challenges of liberalism, modernism, and Darwinism by requiring strict adherence to a set of “fundamental” doctrines.

***Dispensational Premillennialism:*** an eschatological doctrine that establishes a sequence of events for the end times, asserting that the anti-Christ will soon rise, the second coming of Christ is imminent, and all things will culminate in a millennial reign of Christ.

Unfortunately for its adherents, the fundamentalist movement unraveled as a consequence of relentless attacks in the culture, exhaustion, and infighting. The sense of fierce theological independence that gave fundamentalism its start made it difficult for its leaders to form a cohesive movement.<sup>25</sup> In the 1930s, the fundamentalist coalition, which had included Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists, began splintering along doctrinal lines. Many of the movement’s leaders embraced a controversial new doctrine called **dispensational premillennialism**, which argued that the end of all things was coming and that the anti-Christ would soon rise. One sign of this, they argued, was that churches would discard their doctrinal beliefs in pursuit of a misguided sort of unity, the Interchurch World Movement, often derisively called **ecumenism by fundamentalists**.<sup>26</sup> To dispensational premillennialists, there was only one reasonable response: leave such churches and “be separate from them” (2 Cor. 6:17).<sup>27</sup> Continued association was a sign of being secretly wed to liberal doctrines.<sup>28</sup>

These conflicts are still with us today. Churches are still forfeiting essential doctrines. Mockery of biblical doctrines is common. Many churches have become proxies of one political party or another or have endlessly divided themselves through increasingly fine doctrinal distinctions. Pastors are still openly living lifestyles that contradict biblical teachings about marital purity. Where do we go from here?

## 7. THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN CONSERVATISM

Out of the cultural conflict between liberalism and fundamentalism rose a new movement of Protestant Christians who claimed a born-again experience, believed the Bible is true, and were involved in like-minded churches. They called themselves the “new evangelicals.” In

***Ecumenism:*** the push to foster unity among various Christian traditions that disagree on key doctrinal issues.

the 1950s, Christian leaders who wanted to see orthodox Christianity more effectively engage the culture formed the National Association of Evangelicals, with Harold Ockenga as president. Joining the organization were Carl F. H. Henry and other evangelicals who held to conservative positions on the truth of Scripture and were strongly critical of liberal theology and **Secularism**.<sup>29</sup> This new

tradition became the largest religious movement in the United States, constituting up to 47 percent of the population in 2005 before decreasing to 25 percent by 2014.<sup>30</sup>

But then the 1960s happened. The Vietnam War. Drugs. The sexual revolution. Rebellion against authority. Though only a small percentage of the population actually participated in it, their numbers were large enough to shift American culture in a very different direction. This is especially true of the sexual revolution, which led to the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, legalizing surgical abortion on demand.

Without a strong sense of what Christian cultural engagement involved, **evangelicalism** seemed incapable of responding to these trends. For example, the organization producing this book (Summit Ministries) took an immediate stand against the *Roe v. Wade* decision through the publication of David Noebel's book *Slaughter of the Innocent*. Yet other evangelical groups were neutral or even viewed abortion favorably, at least at first. Shortly after the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist Press celebrated the decision for having "advanced the cause of religious liberty, human equality and justice."<sup>31</sup> Today the Southern Baptist Convention is strongly pro-life, as is the larger evangelical Christian community, but at the time, evangelicals struggled to figure out how to respond to cultural issues.

Then an evangelical ran for president. Not only was he a self-proclaimed born-again Christian, but he was also a Sunday school teacher in a Baptist church and an honored military veteran. His name was Jimmy Carter. In the wake of the Nixon Watergate scandal, the nation was craving a president whose honesty and decency seemed above reproach. Carter was elected handily.

Things immediately started going wrong. Carter's approach to economic issues seemed to make things worse, not better. Gas prices skyrocketed. Inflation was out of control. And the people he put in charge of social policy were quite liberal in their viewpoints. For example, the Carter administration formed the Department of Education, which immediately began taking steps that, for many evangelicals, threatened the freedom of parents to educate their children in Christian schools. All of these actions left America dispirited.

One Virginia pastor had had enough. He set about forming a network of patriotic, concerned Christians to respond to the drift away from Christianity that he perceived in America. The pastor's name was Jerry Falwell, and his organization was called the **Moral Majority**. Millions of people joined, and the effect was immediate. Falwell's organization and similar groups got behind the

***Secularism: an atheistic and materialistic worldview that advocates a public society free from the influence of religion.***

***Evangelicalism: a mid-twentieth-century Protestant movement that sees the essence of Christianity as the gospel: salvation comes by grace through faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ.***

***Moral Majority: a late twentieth-century political and religious movement founded by Jerry Falwell to further Christian ideals through conservative politics—namely, promoting laws that restrict abortion on demand and protect religious expression in public education.***

presidential candidacy of former California governor Ronald Reagan. Before an audience of fifteen thousand Christian leaders in Dallas, Texas, Reagan said, “I know this is a non-partisan gathering, and so I know that you can’t endorse me, but I only brought that up because I want you to know that I endorse you and what you’re doing.”<sup>32</sup>

**To many people, Reagan was a hero who changed the course of history.**

The overwhelming popularity of Ronald Reagan enabled conservatives to enact many parts of their agenda, primarily lowering the federal income-tax rate and strengthening foreign policy. The effect was dramatic: lower unemployment, lower inflation, and increased economic growth. To many people who remember that era,

Reagan was a hero who changed the course of history.

## **8. THE END OF CHRISTIAN CONSERVATISM AS A MASS MOVEMENT**

The influence of Christian conservatism continued through the turn of the century, even though it waned in the 1990s as it faced unrelenting criticism from cultural elites in both political parties and the media. Despite a vague sense that Christian conservatism had run its course, the movement largely succeeded in accomplishing many of its aims, which included obtaining restrictions to abortion on demand and establishing a system of Christian schools and colleges across the country, some of which became quite large,

***Two-Kingdoms Theology: based on an idea expressed by Martin Luther, two-kingdoms theology distinguishes between the kingdom of God (i.e., the church) and the kingdom of humanity (i.e., the state), contending that Christians should not promote their religious views outside the kingdom of God.***

including Liberty University, which Jerry Falwell founded during the Moral Majority days. Groups like the Christian Action Council, cofounded by theologian Harold O. J. Brown and former US surgeon general C. Everett Koop, not only inspired the pro-life movement but also helped establish a network of crisis pregnancy centers that opposed abortion yet still offered counseling and practical support to women with unwanted pregnancies.<sup>33</sup>

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, though, evangelicalism began to splinter for at least three reasons. First, there was a growing resistance to the way Christians were involved in the culture. Mostly, the movement was seen as too political. Separationists like Shane Claiborne held this view, as well as a small yet influential group of Presbyterian theologians who embraced what is known as the **two-kingdoms theology**. According to this view, Martin Luther’s distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of humanity actually represents the kingdom of the church and the kingdom of the world, and therefore the Bible’s teachings are relevant only to the life of the church, not to civil government. Says Michael Horton, one of the two-kingdom theologians: “The central message of Christianity is not a worldview, a way of life, or a program for personal and societal change; it is a gospel.”<sup>34</sup>

The second reason evangelicalism began to splinter has less to do with a well-thought-out theological position than with a loss of enchantment among those in the rising generation.

LifeWay researcher Ed Stetzer found in 2007 that of those who regularly attended youth group as teens, only about 30 percent regularly attended church as twentysomethings.<sup>35</sup> Saying they needed a break from church, young adults seemed to stop seeing the Christian faith as important to their everyday lives. Christian Smith, a sociologist at the University of Notre Dame, has suggested that most young people who claim to be Christian have very shallow roots. Their primary theological beliefs are that God loves them and wants them to be happy, a view he calls **moralistic therapeutic deism**.<sup>36</sup> To this way of thinking, God is a kindly grandfather who gives us treats and chuckles at our naughty antics.

The third reason evangelicalism began coming apart is a rebranded reemergence of an old heresy called **gnosticism**. In this view, what we do in this world is really irrelevant because ultimate reality is not physical but spiritual. In the early days of the church, after Jesus's resurrection, gnostics went so far as to proclaim that Jesus didn't really appear in the flesh, because they saw the physical world as evil, and appearing in the flesh would have meant that Jesus participated in evil. Early church leaders condemned gnosticism as a radical and dangerous misunderstanding of the gospel. John the apostle stated very strongly that anyone who "does not confess [that] Jesus [came in the flesh] is not from God" (1 John 4:3). Still, in modern times, discouragement with the way things are going has led many people, including many Christians, to flirt with the idea that the physical world is unimportant.

Today, whether because of embarrassment at Christian political involvement, theological shallowness, or a rising sense that what we do in the physical world doesn't matter, evangelical Christianity in America is declining in both popularity and influence. In fact, in 2009 Michael Spencer predicted in a widely read *Christian Science Monitor* op-ed that evangelicalism would collapse within a decade.<sup>37</sup> Others, however, have taken issue with such a dire assessment, pointing out that while less committed believers seem to be moving away from orthodoxy, the number of committed evangelicals remains steady. Still, it's hard to see churches being converted into playhouses, libraries, skate parks, and nightclubs and not wonder whether Spencer's predictions are coming true.

In this book, our aim is not to "save" evangelical Christianity. Rather, we wish to see the difference it would make if we consistently applied a biblical worldview to today's perplexing issues. To do this, we'll need to explore a middle way between the secular idea that the physical world is all there is and that the spiritual world is irrelevant, and the gnostic idea that the physical world is irrelevant because only the spiritual world is ultimately real. The approach

*Moralistic Therapeutic Deism: a term coined by sociologist Christian Smith in reference to the shallow beliefs of many young Christians in the twenty-first century; the belief that God loves everyone and wants them to be happy.*

*Gnosticism: a second-century heretical Christian movement that taught that the material world was created and maintained by a lesser divine being, that matter and the physical body are inherently evil, and that salvation can be obtained only through an esoteric knowledge of divine reality and the self-denial of physical pleasures.*

we'll test rests on the ideas that both the physical and the spiritual matter to God. As a spiritual being, God made creation and proclaimed it "good."

The gospel doesn't deny or trivialize any aspect of our fallen humanity but offers us full restoration. In other words, as the Colson Center's John Stonestreet observes, we're not saved from our humanness but to it.<sup>38</sup> The revered thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas put it this way: "Grace does not destroy nature, but completes it."<sup>39</sup>

At the outset, we readily admit that in addition to the opposition Christianity faces in the world, there are significant differences among Christians themselves. Such categories as "born-again" or "evangelical" or "fundamentalist," even though they are often used in a derogatory fashion, are not monolithic. They include people of all races and political persuasions, as well as a bewildering array of theological beliefs. Undoubtedly, the majority of evangelicals describe themselves as politically conservative, but even this category defies description when it comes to issues like the appropriate level of government intervention, taxes, the best way to care for the poor, foreign policy, and so forth.

Today the question for many Christians is whether it is even possible to be actively concerned about what is happening in the world without resorting to blunt political force on the one hand or seemingly pious separation on the other. Is it possible for Christians to care about culture without implying that we are somehow responsible for bringing about God's kingdom on Earth? Might there be a way to bring Christians together across long-drawn theological lines to focus on how to help everyone flourish in our culture without abandoning firm adherence to biblical truth?

**Might there be a way to bring Christians together across long-drawn theological lines to focus on how to help everyone flourish in our culture without abandoning firm adherence to biblical truth?**

These are not easy questions. But the answer to each question is yes. Let's examine why.

## **9. WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL REASONS FOR CARING?**

As Christians, we want to care about what God cares about. From Scripture we can discern that God cares about his glory, that we bear his image, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. He cares about a great deal more, of course, but from these three principles we can build a faithful biblical response to the most pressing issues of our age.

### *God Cares about His Glory*

In the New Testament, the Greek word for "glory" is *doxa*, which means "good reputation" or "honor." Saint Augustine defined *glory* as "*clara notitia cum laude*," or "brilliant celebrity with praise."<sup>40</sup> God's glory is so immense that all of nature proclaims it. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." In the world to come, God's glory will sustain us. Revelation 21:23 says of heaven, "The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb."

Sin has caused humans to fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23).<sup>41</sup> Even worse, in our sin, we attempt to exchange the glory of God for created images (Ps. 106:20; Rom. 1:23).<sup>42</sup> Because



of God's grace, though, we may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2),<sup>43</sup> and we can look forward to freedom from bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:21).<sup>44</sup>

Jesus Christ made this redemption possible. He is, according to Scripture, the glory of God. Hebrews 1:3 says, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."

It is in and for his glory that Jesus Christ calls us and equips us for great things. Second Peter 1:3 tells us that "[God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." This is why 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

## ***God Cares That We Bear His Image***

In the very name God gave himself, YHWH (Gen. 2:4),<sup>45</sup> he shows himself to be the maker of covenants and the rescuer of his people. These are relational attributes, and it makes sense because God is a relational God. Right from Genesis 1:26–28<sup>46</sup> the Bible portrays God as a king who, instead of erecting statues of himself, as kings in the Near East were known to do, created image bearers—living, breathing humans to serve as stewards of his creation.<sup>47</sup>

Humanity has a special place in God's creation. In the biblical narrative, human beings are divinely created to bear the *imago Dei*, the well-known Latin term for "image of God." As opposed to pagan creation stories in which only the supreme ruler bears God's image, there is in Scripture a sense in which *all* human beings bear God's image.<sup>48</sup> And the very nature of God's plan for human beings was, according to the biblical text, "*very good*." In Hebrew, the phrase is *tob meod* (pronounced "töve MAY-odd"), which refers to something so exceedingly, abundantly, and immeasurably good that happiness is the natural result.<sup>49</sup>

***Tob Meod: a Hebrew phrase translated as "very good"; the very best thing possible; the ultimate superlative of good.***

Your *being*, who you are as an image bearer of God, precedes any action you may take. We call people human *beings*, not human *doings*, for a reason. That humans specially bear God's image and aren't mere playthings for the gods is the single biggest distinguishing characteristic between the Judeo-Christian conception of humanity and all others. According to this view, human beings are actually distinct and inherently valuable persons regardless of size, level of development, environment, or degree of dependency.<sup>50</sup> They have a definable *essence*.<sup>51</sup>

***That humans specially bear God's image and aren't mere playthings for the gods is the single biggest distinguishing characteristic between the Judeo-Christian conception of humanity and all others.***

So what does this have to do with caring? It's simple. Each and every person bears God's image. If God cares enough about people to impart his image to them, how could we justify caring any less? Unfortunately, we humans often abuse the image of God by inviting others to worship *us* rather than the Creator. As Dave Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons write in *UnChristian*, this is a major problem for the rising generation:

By a wide margin, [according to a Pew survey,] the top life priorities of eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds are wealth and personal fame. Objectives like helping people who are in need, being a leader in the community, or becoming more spiritual have much less traction among young Americans than they do among older adults.<sup>52</sup>

Luton First, sponsor of Britain's National Kids' Day, corroborated these findings in a survey that asked British schoolchildren under age ten, "What do you think is the very best thing in the world?" The number one reply was "Being a Celebrity," followed by "Good Looks" and "Being Rich." "God" was the tenth—and last—response on the list.<sup>53</sup>

**Narcissism: the love of or obsession with oneself; selfishness; self-centeredness.**

The term for this obsessive self-focus is **narcissism**, which is derived from a Greek myth about a boy who fell in love with his own reflection. In their book *The Narcissism Epidemic*, Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell lay the blame at the feet of endlessly repeated mantras, such as "You are special," and ask whether this blatant promotion of self-love has the potential to become pandemic among young adults.<sup>54</sup>

Narcissism is a personal problem that morphs into a cultural problem that Twenge and Campbell say leads to vanity, materialism, uniqueness [that we are better than others], antisocial behavior, relationship troubles, entitlement, and self-centered religion and volunteering.<sup>55</sup> The last item on this list, religion and volunteering, should shake us up. Even good things become bad when the goal is boosting self-admiration.<sup>56</sup> When we fail to bear God's image, or bear it badly, even our good deeds can contribute to the overall level of evil. As Isaiah 64:6 states, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

**When we fail to bear God's image, or bear it badly, even our good deeds can contribute to the overall level of evil.**

## ***God Cares That We Love Our Neighbors***

The first two things God cares about—his glory and his image—lead to the third thing he cares about: that we love our neighbors. Scripture says we're to love our neighbors *to the glory of God*. We read in Romans 15:7 that we should "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." The word *welcome* in Greek is *proslambanō*, which implies inviting someone into the life of something. In other words, God is glorified when we personally care for those around us. Scripture reminds us that our ability to serve in this way comes only through God's power and only so that Christ may be glorified (1 Pet. 4:10–11).<sup>57</sup>

**God is glorified when we personally care for those around us.**

That God is glorified when we care for those around us is no minor point in Scripture. In fact, it's a central feature of God's plan. In the Old Testament, Leviticus 19 is just one passage that speaks of how we should love our neighbors *because of who God is*:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. (vv. 9–15)

Notice the motivation God gave the people: *I am the Lord your God*. It's because God is glorious that the Israelites were to serve, and this service applied to everything from agriculture to business contracts to dealing with employees to poverty care to legal matters.

Loving our neighbors is the clear, unequivocal response to the reality that they are image bearers of God. In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked about the great commandment in the Law of Moses. He replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (vv. 37–40). Our love for God will be evident by how richly and fully we love our neighbors.

**Our love for God will be evident by how richly and fully we love our neighbors.**

This is a whole Bible truth. The apostle Paul reiterated many key Old Testament commands and makes it clear that obedience to them is part of the way we are to proclaim the gospel. From our economic structures to our personal conduct, Scripture clearly ties everything we do back to glorifying God, bearing God's image, and loving our neighbors. Consider, for example, Romans 13:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (vv. 8–14)

If redeemed people don't care for others by loving them as neighbors, who will? The Christian writer C. S. Lewis believed that the humility of serving our neighbors is part of displaying God's glory: "The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken."<sup>58</sup> Lewis went on to say that

the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations.... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.<sup>59</sup>

***Shalom*: from the Hebrew for "peace, prosperity, and wellness"; a concept that implies harmony in creation and with one's neighbors as well as a right relationship with God.**

Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the connection between our neighbors' well-being and our love for God through the concept of *shalom*—peace, wellness, prosperity, tranquillity, and contentment. At the very heart of *shalom* is neighborliness: We should wish *shalom* for others as well as ourselves. In fact, God told the Israelites in captivity that their *shalom* would be secured as they worked to secure *shalom* for those around them, even their captors (Jer. 29:7).<sup>60</sup>

But seeking the good of our neighbors, which is contrary to our sin nature, must involve repentance, redemption, and renewal. If it doesn't, the good we do may end up *looking* like caring even though it is actually narcissism. We may have the best of intentions but end up doing more harm than good.

## 10. HOW WE OUGHT TO CARE

Biblical caring focuses on attributes that Scripture itself admonishes us to pursue. We'll look at three of these attributes: wisdom, worthiness, and words.

### *Godly Caring Is Based on Wisdom*

Wisdom is central to the Scripture's vision of human flourishing. However, many people find it theologically baffling because wisdom seems to have more to do with what we might

**Wisdom is central to the Scripture's vision of human flourishing.**

call *common grace*—the grace of God that is available to all people so that they might live well in God's creation—than with *saving grace*, the grace available to the redeemed. It's possible for a person to be wise in a particular area, such as developing an artistic ability, and foolish

in rejecting God. Scripture's Wisdom Literature—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon—reveals four distinct meanings of wisdom:

- Skill in a craft; technical expertise (e.g., metal worker, skilled warriors, sailors, farmers, priests, scribes, judges, counselors)
- Intelligence; shrewdness, such as the academic wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 4:29);<sup>61</sup> and the scheming or cunning of Pharaoh (Exod. 1:10)<sup>62</sup> or David (1 Kings 2:6, 9)<sup>63</sup>
- Good sense; moral understanding—the ability to apply knowledge prudently to life
- Understanding the fundamental issues of life—this top level recognizes that the essence of wisdom is theological (“the fear of the Lord”)

In outlining how to live well, the Wisdom Literature is guided by four assumptions:

- The universe is ordered, and life proceeds according to a fixed order.
- This order is teachable and learnable.
- By learning the order in the universe, the individual is handed an instrument with which to determine and navigate his or her way through life.
- The source and foundation of the order in the universe is God himself.

We should, according to the book of Proverbs, pursue a life of wisdom even though it costs everything we have (Prov. 4:7).<sup>64</sup> Normally, wisdom’s rewards are straightforward. We reap what we sow. If we develop the right character and make right decisions, we’ll be successful. If we cultivate poor character and make poor decisions, on the other hand, our lives will be a disaster.

Yes, as we see in Job and Ecclesiastes, things don’t always work out as expected. We’re affected by the presence of evil, by our own limitations, and by the poor decisions others make. But the Bible still encourages us to live according to the principles of wisdom and encourage others to do so as well.

**Normally, wisdom’s rewards are straightforward. We reap what we sow.**

### ***Godly Caring Is Based on Worthiness***

Scripture focuses on what it means to live a worthy life. The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 1:27, “Only let your manner of life be *worthy* of the gospel of Christ.” He went on to say, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything *worthy* of praise, think about these things” (4:8).

The word *worthy* in Greek is *axios*, which means “to be recognized as fitting.” It’s the root word of the English word *axis*, as in the axis on which the world turns.<sup>65</sup> A worthy life is based on such virtues as prudence, charity, hope, and faith, around which the world of humanity turns.<sup>66</sup>

The biblical approach to virtue is very different from the self-help psychologies that focus on *our* happiness, *our* health, and *our* spiritual awareness rather than on how we can live to glorify God by loving our neighbors.

From a biblical view, there is a relationship between an individual's mental outlook and his or her belief about God, Christ, salvation, and eternal life. When we focus on core vir-

**A virtuous person will literally lead out of the overflow of a worthy life.**

tues that are truly worthy, our souls, spirits, hearts, and minds grow. Self-centeredness, on the other hand, shrinks us.

Christians explain that a virtuous life is possible because God, through Christ, forgives our sins, heals our sinful human nature, and replaces our guilty consciences with the fruit of his Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and it is always outward focused. A virtuous person will literally lead out of the overflow of a worthy life.

### ***Godly Caring Is Based on Words***

Twenty miles into my first marathon, I hit a wall. With only 6.2 miles to go, I suddenly felt as if I might topple over. Along that last part of the route, however, volunteers stood cheering, holding signs, and offering words of encouragement. By the time I hit the home stretch, I was so energized that I sprinted to the finish. It might not have looked like I was running very fast, but I felt as if I were flying. The cheering of the crowd breathed life into me at just the right moment.

Words can bring life. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits." Well-spoken words of encouragement enrich us. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver," as Proverbs 25:11 observes. You can probably recall a specific time in which someone gave you a blessing, even if it was as simple as "Good job! Keep going!" Words can also bring death. I once conducted a study of grown-ups who related stories of teachers who'd had a bad influence on them. Stunningly, the people in my study—many of whom had been out of school for thirty or forty years—could remember *word for word* nasty things the bad teachers had said, words that in effect became a curse on their lives.

We owe it to our fellow citizens to speak the truth as we understand it. To not do so is to violate at least three scriptural principles:

1. "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it" (Prov. 3:27).
2. "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Behold, we did not know this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?" (24:11–12).
3. "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute" (31:8).

As we speak the way God designed us to speak, we bear his image well. And when we do that, we can live with wisdom and show ourselves to be worthy in a way that blesses other people. It enables us to be like members of the ancient Israelite tribe of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel ought to do (1 Chron. 12:32).<sup>67</sup> Because they had understanding and used words wisely, they were apparently seen as leaders in the nation.

Words are important to the gospel, which is a spoken message. The apostle John even called Jesus “the Word” (John 1:1).<sup>68</sup> And much attention is devoted throughout the New Testament to living and speaking in a way worthy of him. Ed Stetzer put a spin on an old adage attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel, and *since it’s necessary*, use words.”<sup>69</sup> As we live wisely, walk worthily, and speak words of life, we prepare the ground in which the seeds of the gospel can grow. Caring, then, is at the very heart of what it means to live the Christian life.

## 1.1. WHAT YOU’LL LEARN IN THIS BOOK

It’s a daunting task to apply a biblical worldview to the issues of our culture. We’ll almost certainly have our disagreements—both theological and political—along the way. But our task isn’t to come up with point-by-point policy prescriptions for today’s ills. It is to develop a method of applying our faith to the culture.

This said, here’s a little overview of what we’ll focus on in this volume:

**As we live wisely,  
walk worthily, and  
speak words of life, we  
prepare the ground  
in which the seeds of  
the gospel can grow.**

- What culture is, how it’s fashioned, and how Christians in the past have shaped culture.
- How to become a shaper of culture who thinks and speaks clearly and logically.
- What biblical principles look like when applied to tough issues, such as technology; the arts and entertainment; abortion; euthanasia; bioethics; sexuality (including pornography and same-sex attraction, marriage, politics, creation care, poverty care, tolerance, persecution, religious liberty, justice, the use of force, and community renewal).

Whew. That’s quite a list. Along the way it may seem overwhelming. Even as I write I sometimes feel that there are too many issues with too many angles for me to effectively care about. That’s why I’m trying to keep my eye firmly on the baseline of *shalom*, because, as we saw earlier, *shalom* means pursuing the peace, tranquillity, and prosperity of our communities. *Shalom* is the connection between the way we bear God’s image and the way we care for our neighbors’ well-being.

This doesn’t mean that all of our neighbors will be grateful. It’s very likely that Christians alive today—no matter where they are in the world—will be mocked, denied rights and freedoms, and even physically persecuted for their beliefs. “In the world you will have tribulation,”

Jesus said (John 16:33).<sup>70</sup> God calls us to stand for truth and fight against evil and injustice. Our central question is not “Could I be harmed by this belief or action?” but “How can I pursue *shalom* so people can live in prosperous harmony with one another in a way that glorifies God?” Even if we go to our graves feeling that all our efforts have been in vain, we aren’t to worry, because we have this encouragement from Jesus: “Take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

## 12. GIVERS, NOT TAKERS

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, we humans base our lives on what we believe to be true. If we believe the Bible, we ought to find ourselves increasingly becoming givers, not takers. In my book *Handoff*, I told an old story of a man who visited a farmer friend. As the men sat on the porch rocking back and forth, two of the farmer’s dogs got into a fight. Startled, the visitor asked, “Aren’t you going to stop them?”

“Nah, they’ll stop soon enough. They fight all the time.”

“Which one wins?” asked the visitor.

“Whichever one I feed the most,” the farmer replied.<sup>71</sup>

With every action, we either feed or starve the two competing sides of our nature, the

**With every action, we either feed or starve the two competing sides of our nature, the giver side or the taker side. Takers grow needier; givers become more generous.**

giver side or the taker side. Those who feed the “taker” ultimately live miserable lives. They don’t build anything of enduring value, they don’t leave others better off, and they don’t rescue the perishing. Those who cultivate the “giver,” on the other hand, learn to build and deposit and grow. They gain favor with God and man. When difficulty chips away at them, it only reveals a deeper beauty. When it comes to facing difficult issues, takers wilt quickly and slink away; givers take on challenges willingly. Takers tolerate people; givers shape

them. Takers grow needier; givers become more generous. Takers fill their houses with junk; givers fill their lives with memories.

You and I develop into givers or takers through the endless choices we make every day. Of course, we can’t solve every problem in the world or we’ll get burned out. But the solution to burnout is not to back away; it is to engage biblically. Author Parker Palmer says that burnout “results from trying to give what I do not possess.... It does not result from giving all I have: it merely reveals the nothingness from which I was trying to give in the first place.”<sup>72</sup> Only when we have a clear sense of who God is and what he thinks can we truly care about others.

**Only when we have a clear sense of who God is and what he thinks can we truly care about others.**

So let’s get to it. As C. S. Lewis said in his famous sermon “The Weight of Glory,” “The cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning. A cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside.”<sup>73</sup> Let’s open the door and go on in, first by discussing what culture actually is, how it’s created, and how Christians in the past have shaped it.



## ENDNOTES

1. Thanks to Dennis Prager for this brilliant example from a debate—"Can We Be Good without God?"—with atheist professor Jonathan Glover at Oxford University, March 3, 1993. Prager asked, "If you, Professor Glover, were stranded at the midnight hour in a desolate Los Angeles street and if, as you stepped out of your car with fear and trembling, you were suddenly to hear the weight of pounding footsteps behind you, and you saw ten burly, young men who had just stepped out of a dwelling coming toward you, would it or would it not make a difference to you to know that they were coming from a Bible study?" Of this exchange, Ravi Zacharias said, "Amidst hilarious laughter in the auditorium, Glover conceded that it would make a difference." See Ravi Zacharias, *The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 135–36.
2. Jim Clifton, *The Coming Jobs War* (New York: Gallup Press, 2011), 46.
3. Johannes Gutenberg, quoted in Alphonse de Lamartine, *Memoirs of Celebrated Characters*, 2nd ed. (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), 308.
4. Johannes Gutenberg, quoted in Lamartine, *Memoirs of Celebrated Characters*, 319–20.
5. Agnes H. Gottlieb and Henry Gottlieb, *1,000 Years, 1,000 People: Ranking the Men and Women Who Shaped the Millennium* (New York: Kodansha, 1998), 2.
6. Michio Kaku, "What Happens When Computers Stop Shrinking?" Salon.com, March 19, 2011, [www.salon.com/2011/03/19/moores\\_law\\_ends\\_excerpt/](http://www.salon.com/2011/03/19/moores_law_ends_excerpt/).
7. "Fly with Us: Ready to Become an Astronaut?," Virgin Galactic, accessed July 2, 2016, [www.virgingalactic.com/human-spaceflight/fly-with-us/](http://www.virgingalactic.com/human-spaceflight/fly-with-us/); "The Virgin Galactic Space Experience," Galactic Experiences by DePrez, accessed July 2, 2016, [www.galacticexperiencesbydeprez.com/experience.shtml](http://www.galacticexperiencesbydeprez.com/experience.shtml).
8. Lauren James, "Stars Head for the Stars: Justin Bieber Joins the Virgin Galactic Party," Contactmusic.com, June 7, 2013, [www.contactmusic.com/justin-bieber/news/justin-bieber-space-virgin\\_3708279](http://www.contactmusic.com/justin-bieber/news/justin-bieber-space-virgin_3708279); "Why We Go: Exploring Space Makes Life Better on Earth," Virgin Galactic, [www.virgingalactic.com/why-we-go/](http://www.virgingalactic.com/why-we-go/).
9. "Welcome to Virgin Galactic," Virgin Galactic, accessed July 2, 2016, [http://sites.virtuoso.com/virgingalactic/virgingalactic/documents/vg\\_overview.pdf](http://sites.virtuoso.com/virgingalactic/virgingalactic/documents/vg_overview.pdf).
10. "Human Spaceflight," Virgin Galactic, accessed July 2, 2016, [www.virgingalactic.com/human-spaceflight/](http://www.virgingalactic.com/human-spaceflight/).
11. George Whitesides, quoted in Robert Lamb, "How High Will Virgin Galactic Fly?," DNews, August 2, 2010, <http://news.discovery.com/space/how-high-will-virgin-galactic-fly.htm>.
12. Jim Irwin, quoted in John Noble Wilford, "James B. Irwin, 61, Ex-Astronaut; Founded Religious Organization," *New York Times*, August 10, 1991, [www.nytimes.com/1991/08/10/us/james-b-irwin-61-ex-astronaut-founded-religious-organization.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/10/us/james-b-irwin-61-ex-astronaut-founded-religious-organization.html).
13. Edwin A. Burt, *Types of Religious Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), 353. Clearly, the humanist has no patience with the anthropic principle, which contends that the world was tailored for human existence. For an excellent defense of this principle, see Roy Abraham Varghese, ed., *The Intellectuals Speak Out about God: A Handbook for the Christian Student in a Secular Society* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1984).
14. Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, ed. Cal Seelig, trans. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1982), 40.
15. Robert Jastrow, interview by Bill Durbin, in "A Scientist Caught between Two Faiths," *Christianity Today* 26, no. 13 (August 1982): 17.
16. Sylvia Nasar, *Grand Pursuit: The Story of Economic Genius* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), xiii.
17. W. Cleon Skousen, *The Five Thousand Year Leap* (Franklin, TN: American Documents Publishing, 2009), 4.
18. Partha Dasgupta, *Economics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17. Growth in this sense is measured by the per-capita gross domestic product (GDP), which refers to the total of all goods and services produced, divided by the number of people, and adjusted for inflation.
19. Poverty statistics for 1990 and 2010, respectively. See World Bank Group, *Prosperity for All: Ending Extreme Poverty* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2014), 1, [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1327948020811/8401693-1397074077765/Prosperity\\_for\\_All\\_Final\\_2014.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1327948020811/8401693-1397074077765/Prosperity_for_All_Final_2014.pdf).
20. Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President: Politics for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 167.
21. Richard S. Rhodes, ed., *Dwight Lyman Moody's Life Work and Gospel Sermons* (Chicago: Rhodes and McClure, 1907), xi.
22. Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 15, 97–99.
23. Paul W. Rood, "The Untold Story of *The Fundamentals*," *Biola Magazine* (Summer 2014), <http://magazine.biola.edu/article/14-summer/the-untold-story-of-the-fundamentals/>.
24. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.
25. Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13–15.
26. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 39–40.
27. Second Corinthians 6:17: "Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you."

28. The doctrine of separation from theological liberalism grew into what is called *secondary separation*, in which associating with people who associate with liberals is considered a sign of a person's liberalism. So if you have a friend who has a friend who is theologically liberal, you might be a liberal yourself.
29. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 148–50, 199.
30. Gallup survey, 1991–2005, cited in Frank Newport and Joseph Carroll, “Another Look at Evangelicals in America Today,” December 2, 2005, Gallup, [www.gallup.com/poll/20242/Another-Look-Evangelicals-America-Today.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/20242/Another-Look-Evangelicals-America-Today.aspx). According to the Pew “US Religious Landscape Study” conducted between 2007 and 2014, American evangelicals stand at 25.4 percent of the population. See Alan Cooperman et al., “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, [www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/).
31. Quoted in Tom Strode, “Roe, Legalizing Abortion in 1973, Caused Baptists to Embrace Life,” Baptist Press, January 18, 2013, [www.bpnews.net/39549](http://www.bpnews.net/39549).
32. Ronald Reagan, campaign speech transcript, “National Affairs Campaign Address on Religious Liberty,” Dallas, Texas, August 22, 1980, <http://americanhretoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganreligiousliberty.htm>.
33. Some of the positive impact of theologians who embraced Christian conservatism may be seen in the obituary written of Harold O. J. Brown by John D. Woodbridge. See Woodbridge, “Harold O. J. Brown 1933–2007,” *First Things*, July 10, 2007, [www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2007/07/harold-oj-brown](http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2007/07/harold-oj-brown).
34. Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 105.
35. LifeWay Research, 2007, in Scott McConnell, “LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church,” LifeWay, August 7, 2007, [www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church](http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church).
36. Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), chap. 4.
37. Michael Spencer, “The Coming Evangelical Collapse,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 2009, [www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html).
38. John Stonestreet, personal conversation with the author, August 21, 2013.
39. Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas Philosophical Texts*, trans. Thomas Gilby (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1951; Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003), 16.2.928.
40. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Glory,” [www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5201](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5201).
41. Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
42. Psalm 106:20: “They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass”; Romans 1:23: “[They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”
43. Romans 5:2: “Through [Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”
44. Romans 8:21: “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”
45. Genesis 2:4: “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.”
46. Genesis 1:26–28: “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”
47. While the plural reference in “let us” (Gen. 1:26; cf. 3:22; 11:7) is open to interpretation, polytheism is not an option. All the verbs in Genesis 1 with God as subject are singular in the Hebrew.
48. See Kenneth J. Turner’s chapter, “Teaching Genesis 1 at a Christian College,” in J. Daryl Charles, ed., *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013). Not all theistic religions teach that humans bear God’s image. Islam, for example, does not. The Quran consistently refers to people as slaves of Allah. See, just as a starting point, surahs 2:23, 90, 186, 207; 3:15, 20, 30, 61, 79, 182; 4:172; 6:18, 88; 7:128, 194; 8:51; 9:104; 10:107; 14:11; and 15:49. The Arabic word is *abd*, which means “one who is totally subordinated.” Badru Kateregga says, “The Christian witness, that man is created in the ‘image and likeness of God,’ is not the same as the Muslim witness.” See Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1980), 100, available on *The World of Islam: Resources for Understanding*, 2.0 (Global Mapping International, 2009), CD-ROM, 5350.
49. See “*meod*” (Strong’s no. 3966, Hebrew), and “*tob*” (Strong’s no. 2896a, Hebrew), in Robert L. Thomas, ed., *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible; Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1981).
50. These four points—size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency—form an acronym, SLED, which in turn forms an extremely strong argument against elective abortion. See Scott Klusendorf, “How to Defend Your Pro-Life View in 5 Minutes or Less,” Life Training Institute, accessed July 4, 2016, <http://prolifetraining.com/resources/five-minute-1/>.

51. See chapter 12 of R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), in which he reviews the sometimes complicated but deeply compelling arguments of the philosopher Edmund Husserl about how we can know reality because people and ideas have definable essences that present themselves in a consistent way that others can understand.
52. Andrew Kohut et al., *How Young People View Their Lives, Futures, and Politics: A Portrait of Generation Next* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2007), 12, cited in David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity ... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 45.
53. Luton First, National Kids' Day survey, 2006, cited in "Being a Celebrity Is the 'Best Thing in the World,' Say Children," *Daily Mail*, December 18, 2006. [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-423273/Being-celebrity-best-thing-world-say-children.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-423273/Being-celebrity-best-thing-world-say-children.html).
54. Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 16, 260.
55. Twenge and Campbell define each of the points in this list: (1) *Vanity*—"an obsession with appearance"; (2) *materialism*—"an insatiable desire to acquire possessions"; (3) *uniqueness*—"a strong desire to stand out, to be unique and different"; (4) *antisocial behavior*—"a belief that a person's needs take precedence, and a willingness to act aggressively to ensure that those needs are met"; (5) *relationship troubles*—"using relationships to look and feel powerful, special, admired, attractive, and important"; (6) *entitlement*—"a person's belief that he or she deserves special treatment"; and (7) *religion and volunteering*—"using church and community service as ways of boosting self-admiration." See Twenge and Campbell, *Narcissism Epidemic*.
56. See Peter Greer, *The Spiritual Danger of Doing Good* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2013), in which the author warns that service can lead to either burnout or pride, and risks the kind of Phariseeism that Jesus criticized so severely.
57. First Peter 4:10–11: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another ...: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."
58. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (New York: HarperOne, 1980), 45.
59. Lewis, *Weight of Glory*, 45–46.
60. Jeremiah 29:7: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."
61. First Kings 4:29: "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore."
62. Exodus 1:10: "Come, let us deal shrewdly with [the Israelites], lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."
63. First Kings 2:6, 9: "Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let [Joab's] gray head go down to Sheol in peace.... Now therefore do not hold [Shimei] guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol."
64. Proverbs 4:7: "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight."
65. HELPS Word-studies, s.v. "*axios*," *Helps Ministries*, 2011, cited in Bible Hub, <http://biblesuite.com/greek/516.htm>.
66. Paul Vitz refers to secular authorities who now consider virtue a thing worth pursuing. He says, "Peterson and Seligman list six core virtues, and it is not hard to provide the familiar Christian [fruit of the Spirit—Gal. 5:22–23] or Greco-Roman names for them. Their explanation of wisdom and knowledge is very close to the traditional virtue of prudence; humanity is close to charity; courage, justice, and temperance have not changed their names; and their sixth core virtue, transcendence, is not far from hope and faith." Paul C. Vitz, "Psychology in Recovery," *First Things*, March 2005, 20, [www.firstthings.com/article/2005/03/psychology-in-recovery](http://www.firstthings.com/article/2005/03/psychology-in-recovery).
67. First Chronicles 12:32: "[The men] of Issachar ... had understanding of the times [and knew] what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command."
68. John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
69. Ed Stetzer, "Preach the Gospel, and Since It's Necessary, Use Words," *The Exchange: A Blog by Ed Stetzer*, June 25, 2012, [www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/june/preach-gospel-and-since-its-necessary-use-words.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/june/preach-gospel-and-since-its-necessary-use-words.html). Emphasis added.
70. John 16:33: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
71. Jeff Myers, *Handoff: The Only Way to Win the Race of Life* (Dayton, TN: Legacy Worldwide, 2008), 29.
72. Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 49.
73. Lewis, *Weight of Glory*, 45.