



# RESILIENT

**Fruitful Mission Amidst Adversity**

**2012 Epic National Staff Conference**



**For the RESILIENT men and women of the Epic Movement,  
For those that have gone before them,  
For those that will follow their faith, hope, and love in Christ  
and His promises for all His people  
For those that through Christ will one day join His family**

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One of the wonderful things about putting together this e-book was just how many different people contributed to it through their own stories and through their writing and gifts. Furthermore, all of the articles and blog posts included were written and shaped over the 2011-2012 school year. As I compiled them it struck me just how incredible a year it has been for Epic's "Voice."

The blog posts compiled in part three aren't nearly all of the great posts done by Epic staff over the last year, but they were nominated posts by other staff who found them to be significant in their own formation, reflection, faith, or ministry and leadership thinking in some way. I hope the inclusion of so many great posts from so many great Epic staff serves as inspiration to more writing in the future!

Special thanks to Clarence Chan, Mary Perocho, and Jonathan Chan for contributing their photography to several of the blog posts, especially for the "Nine Elements" series in Part One. We were blessed to see their photos both in the online version at the Epic Resource site as well as here in the e-book. Special thanks goes to Mary Perocho as well for designing the cover art, which also happens to be the theme of Resilient, the occasion for the putting together of this e-book.

I want to thank Adrian Pei, who perhaps more than anyone in Epic, has fought for the expression of the Epic Movement's and the Asian American Christian's voice in writing. And through his involvement in the Epic Resource Site, he has played a large role in platforming the stories and writing of our staff and interns. Adrian and I together spent hours upon hours working on, talking through, writing, and editing the "Nine Element" series and the contextualization article in Part Two. His efforts on those resources are a great contribution to Epic's formation and future ministry, but the engagement over them has been an equally significant contribution to my own journey in ministry leadership and serving cross-culturally.

As Adrian would also want, I want to thank our team – the Epic Leadership Development Team. It has been a great privilege to serve with these gifted and Godly people. For the last five years there has been incredible depth of discussion, inquiry, reflection, and study into what leadership development needs to be for the sake of an Asian American ministry. It's been a journey that has led to the articulation of the "Nine Elements" and much of the rest of what is in this e-book. It's been a labor of love by many, but for no one on our team more than our leader Margaret Yu. She's been the heart and soul of our team in many ways. She has been a great advocate for all of us and has been a tireless advocate for the Asian American voice. Her influence is all over this e-book and so many of our lives.

Thanks also to everyone willing to have their work published in this format and given out! There are incredible writers out there in Epic and more importantly,

incredible people. Special thanks to Steve Hong, Don Diva, Tom Virtue, Leila Wong, Adrian Pei, Vivian Mabuni, and Margaret Yu who all contributed to the “Nine Elements” series by authoring posts and contributing to the dialogue behind the formation of each “element.”

Special thanks also to the Epic staff that went through new staff training in the summer of 2011 and suffered through me as their Bible Study Methods coach. So thank you to Rick, Jayson, Emily, Whitney, and Mary along with the other EFM staff there! It was during those two weeks that the foundations and thought for the article in Part Four was birthed.

This e-book is released as part of the Epic Resilient Conference – the 2012 National Staff Conference of the Epic Movement. As such it is a thank you of sorts to everyone in the Epic Movement – from executive leaders to interns and student leaders and beyond. You all had a hand in what’s represented in these pages we hope it blesses you in some way as a resource and encouragement!

Brian Virtue – Epic Leadership Development

## Preface

In preparing for the 2012 Epic National Epic Staff Conference the idea for an e-book popped up. I thought to myself “What better way to capture the heart and voice of Epic this year and so much of what has been birthed through our staff?” Originally it was only going to be what is now “Part One”, but we’ve expanded it a bit as we wanted to include articles and a diverse collection of writings from Epic staff this year. The end product is a representative snapshot of the thinking, reflection, and writing that’s been done in the Epic Movement this year and I think it reflects both the talent of our staff as well as the richness of the dialogue and conversations that have taken place within the Epic Movement in recent history.

In Part One you’ll find a nine post series entitled “Nine Elements of a Servant Leadership Reproduction Culture.” This series was a result of nine months of collaboration. That’s right – nine months! It’s origins go back further, but this year there’s been some focus to help staff identify and articulate just what it is we’re about when we talk about leadership, reproducing leaders, and mission. Adrian Pei and myself served as general editors for this project and did some writing for it, but there were several authors from multiple teams that contributed to this series (See acknowledgements or the posts themselves!). This reflects a lot of collaboration between Epic Leadership Development and Epic Field Ministry, which has been a priority for us.

Part Two is an article that Adrian Pei has been working on. Conversations about this project started in the summer of 2011. This is a draft of the article, a 1.0 released version if you will, as a final version will be released after more feedback and after some of the content and sessions at the Epic Resilient Conference. But this is an important article – for it deals with the ethical dimension of contextualization and crossing culture.

What is contextualization? How do we engage it?

Is contextualization a “tool” or “strategy” that can be mastered? Is it a means to an end? Is there something more central or vital in contextualization than just the pursuit of culturally sensitive methodology?

This article should be a great catalyst for some of the conversations that we need to see taking place more. I believe some of the approaches and attitudes towards contextualization, even those that are somewhat positive or “on board”, can be barriers to us seeing empowered ethnic ministries that are bearing fruit in their own contexts in keeping with the values and culture of those contexts. Contextualization is not often discussed in the context of the dynamics of power that are always at work in majority-minority interactions as well as really all cross-cultural dynamics in some way. Adrian is taking us into this discussion that is a great service to Epic and our broader ministry context.

Part Three is perhaps our favorite section as it includes over twenty blog posts by over a dozen Epic staff this year. Epic staff nominated all of the blog posts that were included because they were significant, important, or influential to them in some way this year. That's exciting and represents a vision to me of some of how the body of Christ works to build itself up. But more exciting that there is a family dimension to this in that the stories shared so often resonate deeply across all of Epic because of the common journey that so many have been on. These posts speak loudly that the staff of Epic are in this together and that these stories matter! And they matter not just to the individuals writing, but also to the whole Epic community.

Part Four is an article I (Brian Virtue) wrote in the aftermath of coaching the first EFM contextualized ministry coaching group for CCC staff in the new staff "Bible Study Methods" course. The principles included here lined up well with what Parts One and Two were reinforcing especially so it seemed appropriate to include it here as a resource for any interested in thinking about culture, Hermeneutics, and ministry. There is much overlap with the presuppositions we bring to the Scripture as well as to other cultures in the course of ministry. This is an effort to make some of those connections and forecast the development opportunities.

If you're an Epic staff, intern, or student, we pray you're encouraged by this resource and find it to be an inspiration to you in your own journey and in your own writing or other expression of your story. Epic's "Voice" is growing and bearing fruit and we pray that this is just the tip of the iceberg.

If you are not Epic staff, especially if you are not of the Asian American culture and find yourself as an "outsider" to the context of this resource – we invite you to be an insider with Epic for a while! Read the stories, engage the thoughts and perspectives and writing. We pray that if you take the time to read some of these resources that you would leave knowing the Epic story a little bit more as well as growing in your desire to get to know it even more. There's something in here for everyone I believe. We hope this blesses you as you think about culture, ministry, mission, and the Kingdom of God. Thanks for stepping into Epic's world in this way!

## **Part One**

### **Nine Elements of a Servant Leadership Reproduction Culture**

**Edited by  
Adrian Pei and Brian Virtue**

## Introduction

There's no shortage of leadership paradigms out there. When we find ourselves looking for philosophies of how to get things done and mobilize people towards a goal, there are no shortage of opinions and suggestions out there. But as we consider that the heart of our mission is not just getting things done, but reproducing people — leaders who can both be fruitful on mission, as well as reproduce other leaders in kind... it calls for a different way of thinking about and seeing things.

The large majority of leadership content that exists in books, conferences, or on the internet relates to how to get things done. It's often pragmatic (i.e. "The Top 10 Ways to....."). It's often cliché in that now more than ever we're often reduced to drawing from nuggets of leadership wisdom without context through the venues of twitter, facebook, and many blogs. All of these things have their place, but we've been drawn asking questions in Epic as to what is involved in seeing leaders raised up that are truly living out both the mission as well as the Kingdom of God in what they are doing. What things need to be true of us and particularly in how we go about our leadership relationships?

Sometimes we see mission as so strategic and goal oriented that we fail to know how our framing of mission veers from many Kingdom values and actually undermines what is at the core of a God-centered and people-focused mission. So what is at the heart of such a mission? What are the things that need to be lived out, honored, and connected to in order to reproduce men and women who can in turn reproduce those things in the next generation as well?

Leadership development is not just training and equipping people to do tasks and execute areas of responsibility. It's not just about "mastering" our jobs or skills. Leadership development is a holistic endeavor because most of what gets "developed" is birthed or shaped by the culture and environment and values that are actually lived out. We always reproduce and influence out of who we are. So in saying that leadership development is about reproducing leaders, we are saying that leadership development is equally about who we need to become as leaders as well as how we can help others become who they need to be so that they can increasingly live out the mission that God has called them to in this world.

Reproducing leaders has everything to do with intentionally cultivating the culture of a community. What lies behind what we do, and how we choose to do it? What are we about?

**In the following nine blog posts, we will attempt to articulate "nine elements of a leadership reproduction culture." These short posts are the result of a collaborative writing effort by various members of Epic National teams.** These are not intended to be just ideas disconnected from reality, but fundamentals of what we try to embody as leaders in Epic, and strive to reproduce in the next generation of leaders.

The final three blog posts we've grouped together as "Kingdom Foundations." We all know we are called to faith, love, and hope, but we don't often really think about and talk about how these things inform our leadership journeys. And maybe appropriate to Epic's journey as an ethnic specific ministry, how do these three kingdom foundations impact those who are living out the ethnic minority story?

These are important questions. We see elements 1 – 6 as flowing out of and being dependent upon elements 7 – 9. There are some things that always must be true of us and true of how we relate to others, regardless of the specifics of our mission. They are foundational to all of life for those of us who have been brought into the family of God through Christ. No small part of this series is an effort to ground our leadership identity and practice in our Kingdom identity. This is not just about positional truth and remembering who we are in Christ, but it is about understanding the implications of who we are, how we've been formed, and what that means in community for the sake of those we serve and for the sake of the next generations.

So as you read this series, this is also a lot about honor. What does it mean to honor others as image bearers and individuals and communities of great value? What does it mean to honor the work of God through Christ in our own lives in terms of who He has made us and how He has sovereignly formed us both innately and over time? And most importantly – what does it mean to honor God through our leadership and the ways we relate through all of our leadership relationships for the sake of what God's mission in this world?

A failure to honor and respect any of these three relationships (God, self, and others) will corrupt and hinder what we pass on to others through our influence. May we become a generation of leaders that is increasingly able to pass on a legacy of faith, hope, and love to the next generation.

# 1. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

## “Story”

By Brian Virtue, Adrian Pei, & Steve Hong



What makes life meaningful?

What makes our lives worth living?

These are some of the most fundamental questions of human existence. Perhaps one of the best metaphors to help us understand those questions, is found in the concept of **“story.”**

When you hear the word “story,” you might think of some kind of romantic tale, or romanticized medium of communication. But consider it as a paradigm for the way we can make sense of reality — whether it’s our own, others’, or the reality of a whole community of people.

**Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.** Imagine this in the context of the timeline of our lives. Every person and community has a backstory, a story with origins and heritage and identity-shaping influences. Everything we value is shaped by this part of our story, which some might call “the past.” But the past isn’t just a collection of memories disconnected from the present. It is very much a part of who we are today, because it forms everything we find meaningful — whether in our work or relationships. As leaders, we must realize we bring our past into our leadership, whether or not we are aware.

Just like the past, our future shapes what we find meaningful today. We continue to persevere with the hope that there is a future ahead, which will affirm our actions and efforts — indeed, our very existence itself. Whether we realize it or not, hope of a brighter future is the central answer to the question, “What am I living for?” As leaders, we can’t and shouldn’t live disconnected from the future, either, or we will lose sight of the results of our choices and actions.

**Story isn’t just about time, however.** It’s about context, and all the uniqueness and complexity in us, and around us. None of our stories are lived out in a vacuum. We can’t assess any reality, nor embark on any endeavor, without understanding the surrounding factors and variables that give meaning to every situation. Effective leadership and vision recognizes this.

**Story is important to who we are as people, and as a leaders;** in fact, it is so fundamental that we often don't even realize what we are losing when we fail to see ourselves, others, and the world with the respect and depth described above. Without story, we lose connection with the very things that make life livable and significant. Without honoring the larger narratives of time and context, we fall into conformity and lose what is meaningful to us, both as individuals and as members of communities.

Leadership is about engaging life and others, and it's about generating vision. But all of that will be fruitless, unless it addresses the most fundamental questions of makes life meaningful, and worth living. That is what keeps each of us going, and persevering towards the mission, knowing that our stories will find redemption in God.

**Discussion Questions:**

What is your backstory? What aspects of your past do you most bring into your leadership today?

The post above says, "Without honoring the larger narratives of time and context, we fall into conformity and lose what is meaningful to us, both as individuals and as members of communities." How have you seen this played out in your own (or others') approach to leadership or ministry?

## 2. On the Road to Fruitfulness in its Mission, Epic Is About....

“Growing in Identity”

By Brian Virtue & Adrian Pei



### Who am I?

#### Who are you?

These seem like simple questions, yet they are deeply significant to leadership and the serving of others. In fact, when it comes to leadership development, there may be nothing more important to start with, than understanding and living out of our **identity**.

Identity is not just formed by strengths or weaknesses or the results we have received from taking various inventories that attempt to describe who we are in some way. **At its heart, it involves three elements:**

**First, identity is about grasping one's uniqueness in community.** Those that only see identity in terms of positional identity of “who we are in Christ” according to the Scriptures need to be reminded that positional identity is still being lived out and experienced in the various contexts of a person's life. God has been forming and shaping us through a myriad of variables, including: family dynamics, geography of residency, significant experiences, ethnicity and culture, socio-economic class, status of power and privilege, organizational influences, and so many more.

Growing in identity comes from seeing and grasping how these factors have formed us, and shaped our values, preferences and capacity. God, in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty, continues to use our contexts to shape us in conjunction with who we were designed to be.

**Second, identity is about accepting complexity in community.** As individuals, we are not fixed entities that do not change. We live in a dynamic world, where every experience and relationship leaves its mark on us, contributing to our story. And we in turn make our marks on others' stories as well. But while we are influenced by our environments, we are not to be defined by people or environments. On the contrary, as we learn to recognize and acknowledge God as a complex Being who is interweaving our contexts and stories together, we are freed to live in awareness and intentionality. We can grow in recognizing and embracing our God-given ability to choose how we will live, rather than blindly reacting to what is going on around us.

**Finally, identity is about understanding and honoring diversity in community.** So often, grasping one's own uniqueness leads to a greater appreciation for differences we see in other people. It becomes clearer to us that "one size does not fit all." And as we honor diversity, we see how each unique person, group, and culture contributes distinct value to the whole. Moreover, as we navigate the tension of working with those different from ourselves, we move towards an even clearer vision of who we are.

Growing in and stewarding our identity are fundamental to leadership development. **Leaders must be able to relate to those who are different from themselves, without losing their own sense of who they are, or else fail in the partnering and bridging that are so vital to fruitfulness and mission.**

#### **Discussion Questions:**

The post above lists a myriad of variables that impact identity, including: family dynamics, geography of residency, significant experiences, ethnicity and culture, socio-economic class, status of power and privilege, organizational influences, etc. Reflect on how God has used 2-3 of these to shape you and your leadership today. Discuss with your team.

Honoring complexity and diversity are fundamental to working with, and ministering to, other people. What does it mean to you, to relate to those who are different from you, without losing your sense of who you are? What might that look like in your context, in terms of partnership and mission?

### 3. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

“Servant Leadership”

By Brian Virtue



Servant leadership is commonly referred to today as an ideal model of what spiritual leadership should embody. Unfortunately, definitions vary and understandings vary even more. **At its core, servant leadership is about giving your power away for the sake of others.**

One's position, title, or influence brings a power in community that one can use to preserve one's own influence, or use to increase the dignity and influence of others.

Servant leadership rejects the idea that titles and positions are the ultimate source of authority.

The pursuit of power reflects a philosophy in which the leader is the one to be served by others, which goes directly against the way of the cross. Servant leadership brings the question of what it means to steward power into full focus.

**When we have power to lead change and influence – how do we use it?**

**What is the ethical impact of our leadership on those around us?**

But there are two big ways in which servant leadership is misunderstood, and ultimately lived out.

First, instead of servant leading being about giving away power, some interpret servant and spiritual leadership to be a giving away of self or [identity](#). Whether due to low self-confidence, people-pleasing tendencies, a guilty conscience, or exposure to various teachings that cause people to second-guess their own needs and limits – many of us struggle with knowing how to serve, without losing ourselves in the process. Servant leadership, while often sacrificial, is not a limitless and boundary-less “spending” of self for the sake of meeting others' expectations or pleasing others. Servant leadership involves not just a stewardship of power, but a stewardship of self and identity.

The other significant way in which servant leadership is misconstrued is when leaders believe that they are truly serving God and others because of their sacrificial dedication to the mission or cause, yet people aren't being truly valued, served, or empowered in the process. Sometimes we believe that if we are working really hard, and even enduring through great stress and responsibility, then it automatically follows we are serving others. But that can be a powerful lie!

In our goal-oriented and often pragmatic culture, we often serve our own strategies and can develop a blind eye to the realities of the people that those strategies affect. We can often choose strategy over [story](#). Yes, servant leadership is strategically focused on mission, but it doesn't overlook or minimize the stories and values of people in the process.

When the identities and stories of those we serve are honored and drawn out, rather than being lost to tasks and strategy, we're making room for more leaders and investing in communities with greater integrity and trust. **That is what servant leadership is about – stewarding power for the sake of helping other leaders emerge... into the fullness of their identities, and in the context of their stories.**

### **Discussion Questions:**

The first misconception of “servant leadership” was described as giving away oneself, through self-sacrifice or people-pleasing. How have you seen this in yourself or in others' leadership?

The second misconception of “servant leadership” was described as working hard on our own strategies, without considering the stories and empowerment of those we serve. How have you seen this in yourself or in others' leadership?

What might it look like for you to give away power for the sake of others, without losing yourself?

## 4. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

“Empowerment & Reproducing Leaders”

By Tom Virtue



Early on in ministry when I was a student, I was asked by my leaders to take on one of the biggest areas of responsibility and influence on campus. It completely took me by surprise, but it ended up being a turning point in my life! It helped me feel like I belonged and from then on I felt a huge sense of ownership for the mission, and more than that, I felt trusted.

I felt **empowered**.

At that point I began to see myself as a leader, and I also began to act like it!

It was an empowering time for me, but empowerment isn't just about asking people to do something. And despite much confusion today, **empowerment is NOT delegation**. It's not the simple transferring of responsibilities to others, even if we heap on praise and compliments to convey how much we trust and believe in them.

Conveying praise while delegating tasks, without a context of relationship, can even come across as pragmatic flattery – trying to be positive and say what needs to be said to get somebody to do what you want them to do. That's not empowering and can actually achieve quite the opposite effect – people feeling used. This is in large part due to the fact that...

**Empowerment does not take place outside of relationship!**

Empowerment is also not just a matter of giving others a chance to prove themselves or “step up” to the occasion, even though sometimes an opportunity is all some people need. **Being an empowering leader of others is never only about the task at hand – it's always about the person, and helping them to succeed and grow as a leader.** To develop leaders, we must do more than delegate and “just get out of the way.”

Empowerment means that there is a shared responsibility in dialoguing about what is needed to help a person succeed. In most cases, it's not enough to have an open door policy, where we put the burden on others to just “let us know” if they need help. Yes, when we're entrusted with

responsibility, we need to communicate what we need help in, and take ownership of a situation ourselves. But when we are the ones empowering others, we must also be willing to go out of our way to discover what will set up people to succeed.

**We must always be asking the question: “What is going to help this person (or these people) succeed in what we are asking them to do?”**

Empowerment is not passive! It’s active, intentional, and relational. It’s about creating an environment so that leaders can thrive. It’s about making space for people to step into the authority and personal maturity to meet the demands of their reality, and to live out their God-given identity in the context of mission. **This requires great thought and understanding of each person and context.**

That’s what my leaders many years ago did for me. They had to give up two things: power and time. In giving me authority and influence, they had to wrestle with the loss of them personally of influencing the next group of students. In their intentionality to help me succeed as a leader, it took a great investment of time that involved personal sacrifice for them. **For many leaders, there’s nothing more valuable than our own time – which is part of why empowerment is such a challenge for us!**

**But empowerment does not just yield loss and sacrifice.** It produces incredible gains and often for a lifetime! If somebody had told me years ago, that I would spend the next few decades of my life working with college students, I would have fallen over in shock, because I didn’t necessarily fit any “normal” slot in the organization at the time. But that’s another key: if we treat empowerment as simply filling organizational slots, more than likely people will feel clueless about what they’re getting into, or resentful that they feel manipulated to take on a delegated responsibility. Imagine the connections to low morale and turnover, and their impact on fruitfulness in the mission!

On the other hand, if we have the heart to give away power as servant leaders, we will experience the joy of seeing people’s increased dignity and influence, even as they live out who they are and encourage others to do the same. **If we have the integrity to help others succeed, we will see them emerge into increasing expressions of fruitfulness, as a generation of leaders who will make an enduring impact for God’s kingdom.**

### **Discussion Questions:**

Think of a significant empowering relationship you’ve had. How was this person (these people) active and intentional in your life?

Have you experienced someone seeking to empower you, but without the relational component? What can you learn from this experience that you don’t want to reproduce?

What might be 1-2 situations where it would be better for you, for the mission, and for someone you’re working with, if you empowered them to lead something? What might you be holding onto, or reluctant to sacrifice: power, influence, or time? What might be holding you back from empowering others?

## 5. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

“Emotional Maturity & Holistic Transformation”

By Leila Wong



A few years ago I was asked the question, “If you could describe your present life as a season, what would it be?” I was in the midst of a difficult time in my life, and I pictured myself as a barren tree in the midst of a cold, harsh and snow-filled winter. Appearing lifeless, the tree looked and felt dead. However, growth was taking place deep below the surface, invisible to the naked eye. I was learning to be honest, and about what it meant to have integrity of heart, as I walked through the pain and loss in my life. God was teaching me to bring all of myself, including the dark and broken parts that His grace was surfacing, into my life and leadership.

**Maturity is the growth and development of a deepening and abiding life of love and faith in Christ, which happens over time.**

Holistically, it is about becoming who God created us to be; it is the development of all our capacities as a child of God — in our unique identity, as a valued soul created in the image of God.

It is not a self-focused process of trying to obtain personal happiness and fulfillment out of our own efforts or “pop psychology.” It is the transformational process of where what we believe of God in our minds becomes what we truly believe and experience in our deepest of hearts. It is not merely “doing” the Christian life, it is “being” in Him as we live out our life as children of God, so that our doing flows from a heart of love.

Discussions about emotional maturity often generate a variety of reactions, and some may be tempted to avoid the topic altogether. Emotions, especially honest and authentic ones such as grief and sadness, make a lot of people uncomfortable and they surface things in one’s heart, as one is forced to choose how to respond. Emotional vulnerability in our relationships can surface our own anxiety, and test our capacity to engage human pain when we encounter it in others.

Spiritual maturity, which includes emotional maturity, is not stoicism, or the ability to be highly logical or objective in decision making. Highly emotional people can be quite stable and mature.

Some, because of their family backgrounds, cultural heritage, or faith traditions, can view emotions as a sign of weakness or as deeply unspiritual due to a false dichotomy between the secular and the sacred. **But God wants our development and transformation to be**

**more than cognitive. Our development and spiritual transformation are to touch every area of our lives!** And our character and inner emotional framework are vital to both our present and future relationships, and ministry.

Those of us who hold positions of influence, with some measure of power to impact our environments must remember that we don't just set culture by what we do — but culture is shaped in large part by who we are! **It's out of our own maturity, security, and emotional capacity that we explicitly or implicitly determine what topics are open for discussion and which ones will be silenced. We must recognize that spiritual reproduction is happening, whether we are trying to accomplish it or not,** as we model (even unconsciously) and live out our leadership. We must be aware of the influence and impact of our own maturity and capacities, on those we lead.

Anyone can have a self-perception of growth and maturity, but it is in the context of relationship that our maturity and growth are tested and developed, produced and witnessed, and ultimately experienced. Grace and truth are necessary for growth: the deep and unconditional grace of God available to us through Christ, and the truth of Christ and God's word. They also involve our experience of grace in authentic and connected relationships, as well as an honest awareness of the reality of who we are in our strengths and limitations, virtues as well as vices, and who God and others are. And just as a child takes time to learn and grow into adulthood, we too need the time and space to mature, in order to become all that God intended and made us to be, so that our hearts might be wholly His.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

How did your family context impact your view of emotions growing up?

How have your church or ministry contexts impacted your view of emotional maturity, and how important (or not) it is?

What questions are provoked by the post above? What parts might bring you to question your current view of emotional maturity?

The post above states that “spiritual reproduction is happening, whether we are trying to accomplish it or not.” When you look at your team or ministry environment, how do you think your own emotional maturity (for better or for worse) has impacted or shaped the culture? How might that have influenced the leadership and mission of your team or ministry environment?

## 6. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

“Integrity & Nerve”

By Adrian Pei



**What does it look like to be a leader others can trust? What is your picture of a courageous leader?**

As we seek to lead in our mission, we will face adversity that's far more serious than external obstacles to our objectives or tasks. We will face challenges that test our **core identity and character (integrity)**, and our **courage and resolve (nerve)**.

In all areas of life, including in our leadership, we are constantly being influenced and formed by the push and pull of various pressures. Some are forces of conformity, that either overtly or covertly pressure us to adopt the behavior around us — whether it's performing to a certain standard, or having a certain attitude or demeanor. Some are forces of compliance that pressure us to compromise what we believe, out of fear of what others might think.

These pressures are inevitable, but how we respond to them is our choice. **To have integrity and nerve is to possess a stronger determination in who we are, and what we stand for, which doesn't allow ourselves to be defined entirely by the environments surrounding us.** It means being able to lead out of core values over the long haul, without getting lost in tasks and the “urgent.” It's a holistic maturity that allows us to have consistency in what we bring to different contexts. That's the makeup of a leader who can be trusted.

Nerve is not about bull-headed inflexibility, that clings to one view or approach at all costs. It's not about “powering up” on people and stating “this is the way things are going to be.” **Having**

**integrity and nerve means having the maturity to work and partner with others who disagree and are different from us, without losing our sense of self and worth in the process.** These are the kind of leaders who are secure enough in who they are, that they can handle challenge and criticism with humility and grace.

Integrity and nerve does not mean putting on a facade of “unshakeable” strength: the kind hesitant to admit fears, doubts, grief, or any negativity. They’re not about disengaging from the messy realities of living in community, or disconnecting from environments of pressure — some of which can be quite dark and sobering — but having the courage to lead in the midst of them. These are the kind of leaders who can be trusted to not minimize painful realities, that people need to acknowledge and address, in order to reach God’s fullest vision for their leadership and mission.

As we wrestle to meet the demands of reality, we will have to honestly acknowledge how our own degree of maturity and integrity impacts those around us. It takes courageous resolve to live and lead with integrity. It means pain, struggle, and humility among other things. But that is the price of spiritual leadership. But through it all, **we find hope in Christ Himself**, who did not fold or compromise who He was in the face of unspeakable opposition. He endured with courageous resolve, for the sake of His mission — which was each one of us.

### **Discussion Questions:**

What is your picture of a courageous leader? How are characteristics of courage from secular culture different from characteristics of courage as described in the post above?

The post mentions pressures of conformity (adopting to the behavior or environment around you) and compliance (compromising out of fear or anxiety). What kinds of pressure most affect your leadership?

How might a lack of integrity and nerve, as described above, compromise or inhibit our mission? Be specific about how this plays out in your culture and context.

## 7. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

“Faith”  
Kingdom Foundations Part 1

*By Vivian Mabuni*



***“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6.***

What we do in Epic, and *why* we do it, is distinct because of faith. The object of our faith – Jesus Christ – is the source and sustainer of everything.

**Faith shapes and informs who we are, and our impact on others and future generations.** Our leadership, as followers of Christ, is spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is about living and leading out of faith, in response to God’s calling on us. It is about engaging others in ways that draw their eyes beyond this world to see and respond to Jesus and what is true in Him. This is lived out in all of life, not just in devotional times or other structured times to lead spiritually.

The many heroes of faith in the Bible (Hebrews 11), of various genders and backgrounds, put their lives into God’s hands, and trusted Him for things greater than themselves. We learn from their examples that faith is not just cognitive in nature – it requires response and action. Taking action in faith grows our intimacy and first-hand knowledge of who God is. **We come to *know* God, not just know *about* Him.**

We also learn that faith is not spiritual positivity or optimism. Many of these men and women encountered severe challenges, and at times struggled to see what the future would hold. Their faith meant living in the reality that this world was not their home, and that there was a bigger story of which they were a part – a story in which Jesus is at the center. As Christians, faith means living for the unseen, not just surviving or enduring. We draw hope and courage from those who have gone before us, from God’s promises, and from our own past experiences of His faithfulness.

But we must also remember that we are part of a story that continues into future generations of leaders. **As we live and lead in faith, embracing the mission God has called us to –**

**along with all of its responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities – we sow faith into the next generation.** But if our lives are characterized by passivity, victim attitudes, entitlement, or self-reliance among other things, we will reproduce and influence those things in others.

Faith is acknowledging God in all our ways, trusting the purposes and plans He is accomplishing in and through us. It is about having eyes to see something where there is nothing – in people, in mission, and in the challenges of life. As we walk by faith, take steps of faith, share our faith, and multiply our faith, we become a movement characterized by believing God for changed lives and a changed world.

Let us model to coming generations what it looks like to live out our lives “having an ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.” (2 Corin. 5:9) God promises that He rewards those who seek Him. And we find in the end the greatest reward is God Himself.

### **Discussion questions:**

The post implies that faith can sometimes be treated as cognitive. How might you have seen this lived out in your context?

The post states that faith is not positivity, or a “spiritualizing” that avoids or minimizes reality. What do you think is the difference between people who are always positive, and people who have great faith?

What might undermine our faith, or hinder us from living lives of true faith?

## 8. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

“Love”  
Kingdom Foundations Part 2

*By Don Diva*



Any discussion about reproducing leaders and leadership development ultimately must attend to the fundamental question of **motivation**. What is behind how we relate to others, and what is foundational to the vision we hope to see fulfilled among our generation and the next?

For servant leaders and followers of Jesus Christ, the answer is love. The Scriptures put it quite simply, **“We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)** Love is something that we must experience first from God, and it is something that we then express through action in our relationships, communities, and beyond.

But for a number of reasons, our picture of love can be distorted.

**Love can sometimes be tied to our performance and production.** When I first became a Christian my freshman year in college, I heard about God’s “unconditional” love, but experienced mostly expectations and conditions from family members, teachers, and ministry leaders. I felt the enormous pressure, of only being accepted to the extent of what I could produce. This deeply impacted my life and leadership. What I knew in my head about God’s love, and how I actually loved others, were sadly different.

But though God’s love is unconditional, that doesn’t mean He doesn’t care about what we do, or how we live! Love is not warm and fuzzy affirmation or flattery, apart from God’s truth. Henri Nouwen writes, “To love without condition does not mean to love without concern.” Love involves vulnerability and risk, especially as we speak hard truths to one another. Our efforts to love can often leave us frustrated, angry, or resentful. They always carry the possibility of rejection and hurt. **Learning to love others, and to receive love in turn, requires the tenacity to pursue what is best for ourselves and others.**

As leaders, we must understand that we reproduce what we live out. If we qualify love with underlying pressures of performance or production, we will create a generation of leaders who

model those values. If we view love as paternalistic (i.e. “coddling”) or people-pleasing, that will be the foundation of the way others are treated.

**We must also recognize that our impact and influence originates out of our own capacity to love.** If we fear what comes with loving, or if we are really not experiencing God’s rich and unconditional love for us, it will be evident in our actions and relationships. It will reflect in our struggles to truly partner with our peers, to assert ourselves maturely in the face of authority, or to let others take responsibility for their own lives. Our broken images of love as pleasing, performing, tolerating, or controlling all must be redeemed and give way to God’s perfect love that calls for worship and obedience of God Himself, and a deep honoring of one another as God’s image bearers. That means living connected to God and other people — whether Christian or non-Christian; whether of our own ethnicity and gender and class, or of another. This is what it means to live in community, as we help one another experience God’s love, growing together in grace and truth.

When it comes to reproducing leaders, we must remember that for us and for the next generation, the foundation and motivation for what we do in ministry is love — God’s love. To be truly fruitful on mission, we must always ask the questions, “Are we connected to God’s love and becoming more loving ourselves?” and “Are we helping those around us ground themselves in God’s deep love, so that they might become leaders driven to serve others out of that love?”

Knowing God’s heart means radically and concretely announcing and showing that God is love. **When we live that out in mission, we cannot help but be His agents of healing, reconciliation, new life and hope wherever we go.** And this not only will lead to others being attracted to the God we serve, but to the reproduction of resilient leaders who are secure in their identity: gracious yet truthful, confident yet humble, and able to see people’s shortcomings yet believe in them.

This kind of love will raise a generation of those who will embody Jesus’ love, who was Himself full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Twenty years later I continue to taste this unconditional love of the Father, and am grateful that this love is endless.

#### **Discussion questions:**

What did love look like growing up in your home? We have all experienced distortions of love, whether conditional love or “people-pleasing” love or paternalistic love. What is one distortion that you see more clearly now, in contrast to God’s true love?

Is it difficult for you to think of the idea of loving unconditionally, alongside the idea of speaking truth? What’s a recent example where you might have emphasized one, while sacrificing the other? How might you do it differently, if given another chance?

What might others around you (i.e. your peers, mentors, and those you lead) say about the way you love? How does this impact the way you lead meetings, do evangelism, or other concrete things in ministry?

## 9. On the road to fruitfulness in its mission, Epic is about...

“Hope”  
Kingdom Foundations Part 3

*By Margaret Yu, Brian Virtue, and Adrian Pei*

Hope is one of God’s greatest gifts to His children.

There are so many things in life that wear us down, discourage us, and tempt us to despair. **Authentic hope is a spiritual condition or process whereby the heart is able to continue to desire an outcome or promise from God, that is not yet fulfilled or seen.** As servant leaders, hope gives us the courage and strength to live and lead toward a better, enduring future — not just for ourselves, but for others.

**Hope is not wishful thinking. To be hopeful is not to deny reality.** Some leaders, fearing the anxiety of those they lead, are committed to optimism at all costs, believing that if people just stay positive, everything will work out. Or they feel leadership is about projecting confidence and competence, so others do not lose hope in *them*. But this is false hope.

In leading towards the mission, we live out hope by acknowledging the reality of pain and loss that are part of this world. In fact, hope is birthed in our hearts *when* we experience hurts, sin, suffering, and disappointment with ourselves, others, and God. In those moments, our hearts long for a different experience or outcome. If we try to manage morale by avoiding all “negative” talk, we are actually steering people away from true hope, because without grief, we cannot fully grasp God’s grace and promises for a better reality. As servant leaders, we must never seek to guide people’s hopes to *us*, but connect them to the hope of Christ, and what He can do to transform or redeem any situation.

**Hope is also not “passive waiting.”** Sometimes pain and loss bring with them the temptation to act as a survivor or victim, isolating oneself out of self-preservation. But hope is closely related to faith; it is not about living in the status quo until God removes pain and suffering in heaven. **Hope is tenacious. It is about relentlessly and courageously leading as agents of change against wrongs and injustice.** Hope in action is living with confidence that God is who He says he is, and that He will do what He promises.

Hope is also closely related to love. God gives us the gift of authentic community to build resilience and hope, in the midst of our challenges. **When God’s people are able to enter into one another’s sufferings, imperfections or shame, we are able to practice the hope of God’s presence and love by being there for one another.** And these are the kinds of communities that produce mature leaders who can engage the mission with full vision, and persevere through discouragement and despair.

Hope is fueled by love to *create*: whether through works of art, exploring innovative solutions or possibilities, the development of people, or the shaping of a culture in which leaders can grow and thrive. When our hearts have truly been shown a better reality than what we see around us, we cannot help but work to create that for others.

**Hope is a gift: we have the capacity to envision what is unseen — to long for more — because of God, and what He has shown to us.** And on the road to reproducing leaders who are fruitful on mission, God gifts us with His greatest promise: that He is with us along the way, until we see Him face to face. He fills our hearts with the hope that one day, we will become what we were meant to be, with Him in perfection.

### Discussion questions:

- We all at times mistake false hope, for authentic hope that comes from God. Which do you identify with more: thinking of hope as “wishful thinking” or

“passive waiting”? What are some attitudes or areas of your life that reflect that?

- How have you seen “blind positivity” as a denial of reality: in life, leadership, or ministry? What’s the difference between managing morale, and cultivating authentic hope in others?
- Think about the various sources of community in your life. Which have built hope in your life, and why? Which might have discouraged hope, and why?
- As you think about the context where God has placed you, what are the areas where you identify the greatest need to exercise hope?

## Conclusion

These “Nine Elements” are not necessarily comprehensive. But we found them to be fairly representative of the major values we see and draw from Jesus and Scripture in how he went about his earthly mission.

This series is not meant to be prescriptive, but visionary and reflective. They're not intended for us to go through like a "how to" manual, or check off like a "to do" list. "Empowerment" and "Hope" are not tasks to be accomplished. Rather, these nine elements are mirrors that reflect back to us our own story, identity and character as we engage the mission through our relationships. The kingdom foundations must be lived out at all times.

That being said, there is much here that when we seek to live out in relationship will result in more people emerging into who God is calling them to be for the sake of what He's doing in the world – and we become one of those people as well.

These nine elements are part of what it looks like to be anchored in a culture and space in which we are staying connected to that which is most important, guarding against the temptation to trade the dignity of others and even ourselves for conformity, security, or control. We must not lose sight of those things that must always be true of how we engage the mission at all times.

It's often said in ministries and organizations, “People are our most valuable resource.” May we invest in culture and space that truly reflects such a vision so that our hearts, our methods and the fabric of our relationships and community might work together to see God's mission be fulfilled.

## **Part Two**

**A New King of Charge: Reframing Contextualization and Mission**

**By  
Adrian Pei**

What is your understanding of contextualization?

What is your understanding of contextualization?

Whether you're a member of majority or minority culture, when was the last time you thought about what it really means?

Do you feel it's a topic only for cultural experts or those in academics, or something that applies only to those who work in ethnic ministry? Do you see it as abstract and complex, and just want someone to explain it to you, and give you some practical steps to do? Or do you see it as another task or responsibility that you're reluctant to engage?

Contextualization, at its heart, is actually fairly simple and fundamental. However, **it's one of the most misunderstood terms in cultural and ministry worlds**. It's not just an optional seminar topic, led by those who specialize in ethnic studies or ministry. It's not just another strategic objective or task, that we employ for the sake of the unreached peoples of the world.

Some talk about it contextualization as a burden or necessary evil, but nothing could be further from the truth. Contextualization, like mission, is not something we just do for other people; it's something we ourselves need. It provides an example for how any and every ministry should be approached. **Contextualization as an integrated part of mission is a gift of God, that properly understood and lived out, will lead to the most long-term fruitfulness on mission for both the receiver and sender of the message.**

Whatever your view of contextualization, this article is written for you. It is intended to clarify the meaning of contextualization, and explore why there has been so much confusion surrounding it. **But its primary purpose is to help you evaluate your own views of culture and mission.**

The purpose of this article is **not** to defend ethnic ministry, or explain why you should be involved in it. It's about showing a **better alternative** for fruitful leadership, discipleship, and mission -- through a richer understanding of culture and context.

This is a new charge for **all people**, regardless of your cultural knowledge or experience, to embrace your own development as a leader. Consider reading this article as a first step towards that direction. None of us can afford to miss out!

### **Contextualization is a Leadership Approach That Fosters Awareness and Intentionality**

What is contextualization? Some assume that contextualization only has to do with ethnicity and ethnic ministry. Or that all ethnic ministries are contextualized, just by nature of their cultural makeup. But those assumptions are misguided, and here's why.

At its heart, **contextualization is a leadership approach that fosters awareness of the reality and impact of context, and through intentionality in community, helps people live and lead out of that awareness.**

Every person brings a variety of contexts to a group: not just their ethnicity, but their socio-economic class, gender, theology, and so on. Every group is a complex representation of countless cultures and subcultures. On this level, one could argue that every person and group are "contextualized."

However, not every person is **aware** of their contexts. Not every group is **intentional** in helping people lead in light of those factors. And true contextualization is an **approach** that involves awareness and intentionality. Anything less is a diluted form that compromises the meaning and heart of contextualization.

Take, for example, an ethnic-specific ministry group that rarely discusses culture or differences between its members. Or never wrestles with how context impacts life, leadership, partnership, and mission. Such a ministry is no more contextualized than a group of Caucasians who don't discuss culture, and stay homogenous in both makeup and approach.

On the other hand, consider a group that's entirely Vietnamese American, but is so aware and intentional in their approach, that they have unpacked not only ethnicity, but generational, socio-economic, and gender differences within their community. Such a group that others might consider to be mono-cultural, in this way would actually be **more** aware of differences, than an ethnically diverse church that never discusses culture or context. It would be much closer to the heart of what contextualization means.

### **Contextualization and Identity-Based Leadership**

Why is contextualization so vital? As defined above, it is the central process by which people understand their unique God-given identity -- and **the most effective leadership and fruitful mission flows from that.** When we begin to grasp and steward our distinct gifts and backgrounds, passion and purpose follow. We start to recognize how being Native American or Latino, or being a woman or man, gives us a perspective and strength that could not come from another culture or context. We also see how unawareness or devaluing of these differences can lead to **unfocused, non-purposeful, and even unethical leadership and mission.** The process or approach of contextualization catalyzes all of this!

So given how important these things are, why is so little attention given to culture, context, and differences in shaping how we engage others on mission? There are a number of reasons, but one stands above the rest. **We must understand that there are few forces more powerful, and more relentless, than the temptation to oversimplify**

**and choose what is easiest.** Humans and organizations that don't recognize or resist this, will usually default to unawareness and conformity. Moreover, many people just want to be told "what to do." **It's easier to follow a list of practical steps, than to truly engage in learning.** That's why it takes leadership for us to move towards awareness and intentionality. It takes great integrity and persistence to recognize and resist these temptations.

This isn't just a reminder for majority culture leaders. Even statements traditionally associated with contextualization in ethnic minority circles, like "taking the gospel and putting it into a language and context that Asian Americans can understand," can tempt us to uniformity. We too hastily assume or accept that all Asian Americans perceive the gospel through one language or context.

That's why it's so important to emphasize that this process of identity “discovery” or “formation” will look different for each person, though it is lived out and fostered through authentic community. **Contextualization is not about being prescriptive or didactic about “what is true” about a particular culture** – as some ethnic-specific books or curricula might lead you to believe. It's not about creating a culture-specific version of every concept or tool out there (i.e. **the** “African American” way to resolve conflict, or to share one's faith, etc.). That's because **contextualization is not about fostering conformity**. It's about creating space for differences to be recognized and expressed, because even within one ethnic cultural group, we are truly not all the same!

Now, we can (and should) create examples of material that is ethnically-influenced, which provide a model for the **result** of the process of contextualization. But we must take care to never be **overly definitive** in our presentation of these models, because that can rob others of their own process of identity discovery and leadership formation, which are the desired results of true contextualization.

As we live out contextualization, then, it should open our hearts to new visions of God's purpose for our leadership and mission. For instance, ethnic minorities might grasp their cultural intelligence and empathy to minister to those within their own ethnic group, or their linguistic skills to minister overseas. Or they might see the value of their bicultural strength to lead in majority culture settings -- not out of tokenism, but because of all they bring in their background and gifts.

### **Contextualization and "Pragmatic" Mission**

Most conversations about contextualization appear in discussions about domestic and international missions & evangelism. The central question posed in majority culture settings is: "Can we truly reach every person, if we don't bring the gospel to other cultures?" As for ethnic ministry leaders, they appeal to the rising minority demographics in America, calling contextualization "strategic" and necessary because of those statistics.

But these mindsets reveal a pervasive error in the way contextualization is framed -- that the primary motivation to contextualize is for strategic objectives. In other words, **contextualization becomes a pragmatic "means to an end."**

Here's one illustration.

Consider a Caucasian male missionary who goes overseas to Japan. Because he has had great success in evangelism in North America, he doesn't see the need to do much differently abroad. His approach and methods, and the way he measures success and fruitfulness, are based upon his own cultural paradigm.

Over the next few years, he finds that very few people are accepting the Christian faith, so he decides to enroll in a course on Japanese language and culture. His willingness to learn is commendable. However, this man has completely missed the true heart and meaning of contextualization, in two ways: **(1)** his overly pragmatic **motivation** to engage in contextualization, and **(2)** his superficial **application** (and understanding) of what it means to contextualize.

First, the **reason** this man takes the time to learn about culture and differences, is because what he's doing is not "working." Contextualization is optional to him. **If things were "working," he wouldn't necessarily be compelled to engage in it, nor feel the need to do anything differently.** Under this mindset, contextualization is a means to an end, and only necessary when a person perceives that it will help them achieve their strategic objective or end.

In other words, people engage it, **not because it's fundamental to how they should be leading in any culture or ministry, but because they recognize they can't achieve their strategic objectives without it.**

In this common framework, contextualization is viewed as "extra" or **optional**, rather than **indispensable**. In majority culture settings, you hear statements like, "I'd love to learn more about culture and 'ethnic-related' things, but I can't handle any extra work. Maybe I'll think about it when I get things under control." Or, "Contextualization and culture sound interesting, but how much time should we really spend on it? Isn't it more important to get out there and do what we already know, to share the gospel and do the work of God?" Or, "Why do I need to do anything differently? Our ministry is doing just fine. We're seeing great results."

This is also why majority culture leaders can feel like they are pulling teeth to get people to learn about contextualization or culture, or engage in ethnic ministry!

Ethnic ministry leaders can treat contextualization as optional as well. It's easy to want to push it aside for the sake of simplicity, especially when overwhelmed by the complex

work and difficulty contextualization can bring. These are tests that reveal our own view of culture and pragmatism. We need to ask ourselves: **is culture only important to the extent that it fills a strategic need or serves an objective, or does it have dignity and value in itself?** Will we only evaluate how we do things out of pragmatic need, such as when our own goals seem to fall short?

### **The Dangers of a Superficial View of Contextualization**

But there is another, equally dangerous problem in our earlier example of the missionary to Japan -- his **application** (and hence understanding) **of what it means to contextualize**. It's easy for him to think that contextualization and learning are about enrolling in a language course. The reality is, this man could become fluent in Japanese, and study all the books and customs he wants, and yet not ever question or change deeper paradigms -- such as his approach to ministry, or the way he measures success and fruitfulness. He could add his new head knowledge to what he's already doing, almost as an additional "tactic." And many do just that.

In this way, leaders **can keep contextualization at a distance** -- by defining it in more cognitive ways, or associating it with more superficial categories such as: knowledge of language and customs, or even cultural sensitivity training. But true contextualization isn't something one can learn in a seminar, panel, book, or similar ways we might consider "transferable." It doesn't just add to what we already know, but reveals deeper cultural realities that make us re-evaluate our hearts and beliefs.

Moreover, **contextualization and mission aren't just about what we do to transform others; they're about allowing ourselves to be transformed by people and contexts, as God reveals Himself in them**. This happens through relationships with people who open our eyes and hearts to new realities, and ways of thinking about things. And the beauty of this, is that God uses this process to bear **even greater, long-term fruit**: through relationships built on trust and mutual honor, and through methods that last because they are borne out of a natural context. True contextualization doesn't avoid mission. It leads to the most fruitful kind of mission.

### **Strategy, An Ethical Void of Leadership, & Power**

So why is it so easy to treat contextualization as optional or superficial? Again, remember that we face constant temptation to oversimplify and choose what is easiest. In the name of efficiency (or just following what we're told to do), we focus on **"how to get things done" (strategy)** without also asking (or re-evaluating) **"how things ought to be done" (ethics)**.

So, for example, leaders will ask "how can I send more people to overseas missions?" without asking, "do we have the resources and capacity to set these people up for success in a different context? Would they truly grow as leaders and be fruitful?"

Strategy is not bad in itself; we must carefully consider tactics and "how to get things done." **The problem is when strategy takes precedence over ethics.** And in large part due to societal influences, we're often very deficient in bringing ethical concerns and vision to what we do in ministries and in organizations.

In some ways, this is not at all surprising. **Ethical questions demand more from us, than strategic ones.** They can challenge us in the very way we see ourselves and other people; in the way we approach leadership and life. They can compel us to change in deeper ways of the heart. And who likes to be challenged? Who likes change of that nature? It's uncomfortable. It takes humility and sacrifice, especially for those in power who are used to doing things a certain way, and dictate the culture of what is allowed or not. It requires us to consider that times have changed, or that things are different for other people. It may involve reconsidering definitions of "success" and "progress", as well as approaches of ministry we hold dear.

It's far easier to stay within the reality we're comfortable with, and forge ahead in our strategic objectives and plans. It's easier to minimize ethical questions as "abstract" or "impractical." But true leadership brings awareness to the ethical dimension, and matters of the heart -- as Jesus always did.

### **Reframing Mission: Contextualization That Honors**

A few years ago, the mission of Epic Movement (as a contextualized ministry) was described as "bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to every Asian American student and faculty." This is part of what ethnic ministries are after: but consider how limited this statement is, in vision and scope.

The focus of the mission statement above is clear: reaching Asian Americans. They are the "target group", and strategic objective or "end," of the mission. But is that all there is to mission? Is that all to why we do ministry?

When we only focus on the "end" of the mission, it's so easy to minimize ethical considerations of how we treat other people, and whether or not our methods truly honor God. We fall short of the standards God has called us to, as leaders who should always evaluate how we love and serve. We also overlook the importance of our own transformation, as a vital part of the mission of God.

Today, the mission of Epic is stated differently: "bringing the gospel to the world through every Asian American student and faculty." This seems like a subtle distinction, but it's a huge one. Our purpose in Epic as a contextualized ministry is to help students and faculty see and understand their **unique identity**, so that they might bring all of who they are to living out the mission of God. The mission isn't just

about **to** whom, but **through** whom the gospel is being shared. It's not just about what God wants to do in **others**, but in **us** as we engage on mission!

That's the heart behind true contextualization: it's not about learning a special tactic that allows us to bring our agenda to other people. It's about us being transformed, through relationships and stories of people and cultures different from our own. That's the difference between a ministry of imperialism, and a ministry of incarnation. When we only focus on others' transformation, we blame a lack of fruit or results on the "hard hearts" of the people who just won't see or hear our message.

When we see the need for our own transformation, we acknowledge and take responsibility for the "hard soil" of our own hearts, which may be slow or reluctant to re-evaluate and change. We grasp that perhaps **we** are the ones inhibiting the Word of God to truly take root and shape -- as God intended -- for it to bear fruit in each culture and context.

**And that's the problem with mission that is lived out apart from true contextualization:** it isn't transformative for the one on mission. It doesn't keep people connected to who God has created them to be, in their backgrounds, gifts, and passions. And because it doesn't foster learning from different people and contexts, we limit our own capacity for all that God would want to teach us. We stunt our own growth in our understanding of who He is. It's not hard to imagine how such an approach to mission, cannot sustain motivation for leaders to endure, let alone lead to long-term fruitfulness.

But God invites us to so much more! If we have the courage and integrity to evaluate our own hearts and approaches, we can experience a transformation in the very way we lead and engage mission -- and our very lives. Whether or not we're working in ethnic ministry, God is calling us to a journey that can transform how we view people, ministry, and Himself!

**So where do we go from here?**

Regardless of where we are in our cultural journey, we must resist the temptation to dismiss contextualization as optional, or as a topic for those who are more intelligent or educated than us. We must fight the urge to ask our leaders to "just tell us what to do." God calls us to take responsibility for our own growth and development, as we think through connections to our leadership, ministry, and any next steps. **Let us not rob ourselves of this very process, that God invites us into.** This is how we gain a picture of leadership and purpose that flows from our God-given identity, which will allow us to endure. This is the beginning of the foundation of a ministry that builds relationships of trust and honor, which will lead to long-term fruitfulness in any context. That is God's master plan and design: that as we allow Him to transform us through people and contexts, others might also be transformed.

That is the true meaning and heart of contextualization.

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\*\*This version is a draft. An article will be released publically on the Epic Resource Web Site at a later date and after more feedback from this and the staff conference at which this ebook will be released. But this is not a finished version, but one that is still a work in progress.

## **Part Three**

**Notable Epic Blogs  
Written by Epic Movement Staff and Interns  
2011-2012**

## **Section One**

Culture and Identity

# Trust Your Hapas

Robbyn Klein  
[March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012](#)

“Who am I?”

This question sounds a bit over-dramatic (and totally cliché), because I don’t actually feel that confused. I’m a girl, an only child, a Christian. I love music, people, art, reading, and exploring. Easy. But every now and again I realize how many different worlds I’m in at all times. I am a Christian living in a world occupied mostly by those who are not. I am fully immersed in the culture of Campus Crusade for Christ, yet also in the culture of my church at Rock Harbor— two worlds of friends and two worlds of leaders. I am Asian and an American, or, a [hapa](#).

I feel as though I stand in a doorway between the world of both my ethnic cultures. As I look to my left I see a world of community, rice, black hair, K-pop, humility, passivity, identity struggles, and a lost voice. As I look to my right I see confidence, sandwiches, blonde hair, independence, assertiveness, popularity, and unintentional (sometimes intentional) overlooking. I see good things in both, and I am fortunate to possess qualities found in both. I’m grateful that I can easily hop from one side of the doorway to the other. However I know if I went too far in either, I’d gradually lose my unique sense of self— I am neither “too Asian” nor “too white”.

Although I am blessed beyond my wildest dreams to have the perspective and knowledge I have, a big question comes up within my friends, my ministry, even strangers: What does full tolerance and understanding look like for majority and minority cultures? Otherwise stated: What should a Biblical, or even just a humanitarian picture of peace and harmony look like? Otherwise stated: Together or separate?

In this day and age, many would look at the period of slavery and the separateness that pervaded as a shameful time in our history. “Separate” is segregational and racist. It is not tolerant and accepting. This tension comes into my ministry.

I work with an Asian American ministry that focuses on reaching Asian Americans. I am well aware of the controversy and feel I can represent each side well. From the majority side: “Why can’t we all just get along? We are all unified in Christ, and His message transcends culture and ethnicity. Wouldn’t we represent the body of Christ better if we could worship together?”

From the minority side: “Why must I leave the culture that is familiar to me in order to enter into a place where I am misunderstood? God wants all of who I am, so how can I give that to Him when the people I’m learning with and from have no idea what it’s like to be me?” So what do we do?

Do we strive for the ideal situation that every tongue nation and tribe will be able to worship together on earth as it is in heaven, or do we provide a place for people to learn about who they are in Christ without a feeling of judgement? Honestly, they both ask very valid questions and make very valid points. I can go on and on about this but I will make my points simple.

This is an opinion, but is based on my understanding of Scripture and from experience.

1. The priority is salvation. Paul says “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” Paul recognized His freedom of these identities in Christ, but He gave them up in order to enter into a **context that spoke to his audience the best**.

2. The hope and end goal is unity. If a Christian is *unwilling* to cross cultures (this includes not only ethnic cultures, but non-christian cultures, athletic cultures, academic cultures... etc) due to

fear of discomfort, that Christian is not living missionally or in the freedom Christ has paid for. John says in 1 John : “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” One who is fully experiencing Christ’s love should be in a process of being set free from fears. We must ask ourselves if we are too closely tied to our comfortable identities to the point where we are idolizing them. If I am Asian American and am fearful of entering a fellowship that consists of the majority, then I may be idolizing my ethnic identity and not making the effort to love other brothers and sisters in Christ.

3. A healthily balanced person is one who can use all who they are, with their unique background, strengths, and Spiritual gifts to best reach the people the Lord is calling them to, while not holding on to those things so tightly that they hinder themselves from loving ANY and ALL people at any given moment. I am ministering to Asian Americans because I believe the Lord has given me eyes to see their needs, but I am not afraid of crossing cultures that are unfamiliar in hopes that the Spirit will lead me to love certain people I wouldn’t cross paths with otherwise.

4. It’s okay for someone who is confident in their identity in the Lord to NOT fit in into certain groups. I wouldn’t fit in in Korea Campus Crusade for Christ because they communicate to each other partly in Korean and I don’t understand Korean. There is also a different sense of humor. I acknowledge them as purposeful and legitimate, but it’s not the place I belong. It’s okay for us to **normalize some differences**. This, I believe, is true acceptance.

5. Both the majority culture and the minority culture need to take steps toward each other. BOTH do. I can see why Asian Americans seem cliquish and unwilling to cross cultures to Caucasians, but I can see why Caucasians seem ignorant and used to holding the power. Most people in the majority culture I’ve come across are unintentionally ignorant (please don’t take this as being really negative. I think that there are great intentions, but ignorant just means someone has not experienced enough to gain knowledge in an area). The people who are the most blessed often times cannot see the needs of those who are not as blessed. Dominant culture on a whole is not easily able to empathize with those who feel different. This understanding will only come to those in dominant culture if they themselves will cross cultures in order to **be a learner**.

In conclusion, crossing cultures makes a world of difference. Literally. I have learned (and am still learning) how to embrace all of who I am, all of who I can be, and all of who I want to be. I want to serve as a bridge builder, and in doing this I am asking you to trust my perspective as someone who hears the opinions of both worlds and sees the good, the bad, and the ugly in both worlds as well. A minority or someone in majority culture can gain insight from hapas because we may have the most informed bias\* (which causes us to be in some ways less biased than many) while simultaneously relating to whichever world you are more part of.

I invite you to be a learner with me in this process!

Thanks for reading.

\*I fully recognize that there are many Caucasians who are unbiased and very educated. There are also many minorities who are unwilling to cross cultures. I don’t mean to place blame on one side, but for us to recognize where we’re at in our process, how we are portrayed to the other side, and how we can portray ourselves differently.

<http://robbynkministry.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/trust-your-hapas/>

## At Age 42, Redeeming a Negative Message from Childhood

Regina Chan  
August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Cindy Chang, a 42-year-old self-described “unemployed housewife,” sang Puccini’s “O mio babbino caro” in her audition for America’s Got Talent on June 29, 2011. Said Chang about why she never pursued singing before: “I always wanted to be a singer, but my parents said no.” Even her voice teacher said it was too late for her, when she started taking lessons in her mid- to late-twenties.

Watching Chang’s performance gives me hope that even those distant, faraway dreams might one day be realized – maybe in this lifetime, maybe in the life to come – despite the authoritative voices that wrongly tell us otherwise. Most times, the people with those authoritative voices (parents, teachers, or others who believe they know better than us) mean well in what they say to us, but **what sometimes comes across is a devaluation of an individual’s person and true gifts.** (To be fair, there are times when such words should be heeded – for our own good!) This ultimately sets up false ideals for personhood. An individual could potentially live out much of his formative years (and beyond) without really getting to know him or herself and how God created them.

If Chang didn’t come to know herself and her voice (literally) well enough to trust in herself and audition for “America’s Got Talent,” we would never have heard her song, or her story... or her endearing chuckle-snort.

There are lots of good things we won’t get a second chance for in this life: talents undeveloped, opportunities missed, and so on. In a sense, because of these “lost” parts of our lives, we can’t become our true, whole selves. **The beauty of the gospel is, however, that these lost parts will one day be redeemed and made alive, made real.** We will finally be complete – the way we were always meant to be.

*Are there parts of your self that you’ve lost along the way?*

*What are they, and what do you imagine they will be like in their redeemed form?*

<http://metamargins.com/2011/08/21/at-age-42-redeeming-a-negative-message-from-childhood/>

# Why My Home Culture and Faith Didn't Make Sense

Clarence Chan  
October 25, 2011



I was born and bred in New York City, yet I didn't really identify with being a "New Yorker". My Chinese culture also seemed like a blur. I was always around other "yellow people" yet I was labeled as an ABC (American-Born-Chinese). Growing up, I didn't understand why that label was so significant.

I was also confused when it came to religion. Going to Catholic school, sometimes didn't feel too different than being at home, where I was reprimanded for being "bad" and I had to do better to please the respective high powers, God and my parents.

I was one confused kid.

Even after asking Jesus' into my heart during High School and learning more about who he really is, I still had a lot of identity issues of being a Christian Asian-American New Yorker.

Before I explain what I learned about being an AA (Asian American), I want to explain how Hawaiian, West Coast, and East Coast AA's are different...

During my 2009 Summer Project in Hawaii, I concluded that Hawaiian AA's tend to be confused like I was. The state of HI is the only state in the country that is majority non-Caucasian, and their AA's are like our mainland "Caucasians" because Hawaiians are often the 6-7th generation child. Many of them are some "super bred" mix of Asian descent; they could be a 1/8th Chinese, 1/4th Japanese, and etc. This dilution of culture inevitably leaks onto their faith. Hawaiians tend to be very accepting and friendly. Excuse my skepticism, but I think that mindset is only a mask of confusion. I have met many students who believe in Christ as well as Buddha or other "spiritual beings."

West Coast Asian Americans are very aware of their cross-cultural selves. They recognize that the way they were brought up does affect their behavior and values. I would even call them "ahead" of the game. West Coast Asian Americans see themselves as Asians who tend to be American.

Conversely East coasters, more specifically New Yorkers, see ourselves as Americans who tend to be Asian. We are so used to being diverse that our identity as Asian becomes less important. I know this because I felt this way much of my life. In college, I used to challenge why ethnic ministries needed to exist. Aren't we all the same? Why can't we be united and have multi-cultural churches. Don't get me wrong, I still think multi-cultural churches are great. My real intent however, was not that I wanted a big mixing bowl but it was that I wanted to "Americanize" the Asians.

The denial of culture in this urban setting has led many Asian churches in New York to confusion and unbiblical tradition. A Chinese church with two congregations, English and Chinese, will perform acts of service for each other expecting something in return rather than acting out of sacrificial love for each other. This past Christmas, my sister, dad and I, chipped in together to get an iPod touch for my mom. She kept pushing that she give us back the money for it and that she couldn't accept such a gift. She felt that she was in debt to us and it was hard for her to see that it was a gift. So you can see where our Asian churches get this mindset. I believe that our ethnic culture very much affects our faith culture, for good or for bad.

As I learn about my culture, I know there are many aspects of it, which God calls us to leave behind, but I've also learned to embrace it to use it for his kingdom. Having family values is a great thing. Wanting to do well and excel is a great value. It's when our family's calling takes priority over God's calling that brings trouble. In the same way, when we base our identity on how well we do rather than our identity in God that our life leads to despair.

I feel now, it's starting to make sense of why God chose me to grow up this way. I believe being educated about one's culture will strengthen one's understanding of their faith. Learning about my culture has allowed me to reach and share the love of Christ to specific people.

I've come to understand my identity much more than I did before. I'm not an Asian American New Yorker. My identity is that I'm a child of God who tends to be an Asian American who tends to live Flushing, New York, who tends to go to a Chinese Church.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What are some ways you feel your culture has affected your faith positively or negatively?
2. If you know Asian Americans from Hawaii, the West Coast or the East Coast, what differences do you see in how they live out their cultural identity and/or their faith?
3. What steps can you take to discover more about your own ethnic identity?

<http://resources.epicmovement.com/why-my-home-culture-and-faith-didnt-make-sense/>

# God Uses My Unique Identity

Whitney Chen

July 21, 2011

Since interning with Epic in 2009, my cultural blinders have been yanked off. A year ago, I wrote an article for Inheritance Magazine ( <http://inheritancemag.com/issues/issue-7>) about Epic and what I'd understood and experienced about its mission and journey. Now, at CSU as a freshly minted New Staff, I'm seeing how God works amidst the implications of what I stated (duality, biculturalism, storytelling, cultural redemption) more than ever before.

So, the enemy started there. I felt tired and frustrated with navigating between being Asian and American. I grew impatient with defending what's "beneficial" about ethnic minority ministry. And I didn't want to be singled out as ethnic minority staff or as a representative of the changing face of the U.S. I found myself wishing I could just blend into whatever circumstance or group of people I was among.

My core issue? I didn't like myself, thus rejecting God's perfect plan! Awful, right? God and I talked it out, and He patiently dealt with me and my grumbling. He graciously reminded He's in charge, so I might as well stop whining and start walking in faith.

Then, He broke it down:

## **1. My lousy attitude is like a slap in the face to all those who've ever advocated for and represented ethnic minorities.**

I sat among some of those people at an ethnic minority staff picnic in Colorado. Any progress in reaching ethnic minorities in Cru is largely owed to their faith and courage despite misunderstandings and uncertainty. How dare I think so lowly of how far they've come?

## **2. Why do we do this again?**

Renee Begay of Nations (Cru's ministry to Native Americans) shared during the picnic. She felt the Holy Spirit move her to ask for prayer against a stronghold of shame within the Native American community. Even as she shared so boldly, her voice still quivered with emotion. And it hit me: she ministers to Native Americans, NOT because she's Native American, but because God loves ALL people, and she loves God. I don't reach out to Asian Americans because I'm Asian American, but because God wants all people to know Him.

## **3. He doesn't need me.**

I can call it quits whenever I want. Please don't misunderstand me here. I have no power in this situation. As soon as I'm unwilling, I'm useless to Him. God, in His grace, allows me to be a part of something enormously huge that involves my faith, culture, family, gender, face, zeromath-skills-ness, etc. BUT it has nothing to do with me. My faith, gender, culture, etc. is wholly about what God wants to do.

So, who am I to say, "Ugh, God, I don't like being this way anymore! Change me." If God honored my request, He would strip me of all the glorious intricacies of my identity in Him. He wouldn't come to my rescue in these areas of my life. He would erase the opportunity to be glorified through me. At best, I'd be my fallen self: a nonsensical stroke intended for the finishing marks of a masterpiece or a stanza intended for an epic.

It's incomplete. God, in His infinite love and grace, calls us more. Nothing short of magnificently and paradoxically perfected at the root of our sin and our family tree. He wants to shine through all of our being—every stroke, every stanza, everything—to touch every person. He's at work in every identity crisis, painting all of who we are in Him into a beautiful picture that causes others to stop what they're doing and just worship God.

**Discussion Questions:**

**When have you experienced an identity crisis that challenged you to see your culture or background in a new light?**

**Name one thing about your culture or gender that God wants you to embrace (instead of change), that His glory might be seen by others.**

<http://whereiswhitney.tumblr.com/post/7879777655/in-the-heat-of-the-moment>

# Why Self-forgetfulness is a Poor Paradigm of Sanctification

Brian Virtue  
February 10, 2012

I read an article recently that framed sanctification in the paradigm of self-forgetfulness.

**It's been coming more and more apparent that Christians and maybe people in general have no idea what to do with the concept of the self.** Concepts of the self are shaped by so many different cultural and philosophical sources, yet we so often want to simplify the self into one box.

**Is the self the embodiment of carnality, selfishness, and pride?** Those who treat sanctification and maturing as a losing of self as the life of Christ takes over would seem to take this position.

Here's a couple snapshots from the post I read:

"I've said this before but let me say it again: there is nothing in the gospel or about the gospel that encourages me to focus on me. Nothing! It's never honoring to God when we take our eyes off of Christ "the author and finisher of our faith" and center our eyes on ourselves. Never!"

"Any version of "the gospel", therefore, that encourages you to think about yourself is detrimental to your faith-whether it's your failures or your successes; your good works or your bad works; your strengths or your weaknesses; your obedience or your disobedience."

"Sanctification is forgetting about yourself."

Those are strong statements. And if the self is only that which needs to "go away" or be eradicated or destroyed, all of this would probably be right on.

Only – we need to be careful when we talk about self because it's not just a theological term equated with depravity and corruption of sin. Self involves identity and the image of God – those things that shape who we are and how we relate to those around us.

**Self does not always equate to selfishness, self includes things that can't and should not be forgotten.**

To forget yourself in this way actually brings up some associations and elements of eastern religions (such as Buddhism among others) where true spirituality is found through a detachment from self or the world or other things. Sanctification and maturity for the Christ follower is more holistic than the self-forgetfulness paradigm would reinforce.

Now where I agree with the author is that a person's eyes are to be always on Jesus. And we are not to be self-absorbed and narcissistic in where our focus is. Many would be far better off if they heeded some of this advice to take their eyes off the self and kept them on Jesus.

**But it is a logical fallacy that keeping your eyes on Jesus means the forgetting of self.** To equate spiritual maturity with the degree to which self is forgotten is really unfortunate and I think it's destructive and towards the dehumanizing side of things.

**We live life out of our sense of self, it's an existential reality.** We can't do anything outside of that reality that we have a self and it has different dimensions to it that shape our

identity. We need not forget ourselves just to keep our eyes on Jesus. It is when we see our selves as our master that we run aground and fail to remember that we can only serve one Master.

Encouraging people that true spirituality is a rejection in ways of who they are where they just lose themselves in Jesus is profoundly unbiblical in my mind and actually unspiritual too. It's an attractive thought to many and it sounds so spiritual and amazing – **except for that it's not.** There's a lot of movements in the history of the church that haven't done so well with the rejection of a lot of the parts that make us human. Equating this perspective of self-forgetfulness with the "true gospel" when it's framed the way it is I don't think is super helpful to those seeking to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind.

There's a piece here to where such a philosophy (and it does have philosophical and not just "biblical" underpinnings) is also often **ethno-centric**. Majority culture folks don't often think about identity – because they don't often have too. For evangelicals identity is mostly viewed through almost an exclusively positional lens: who you are in Christ and who you are outside of Christ (which is of great importance). Part of this is because evangelicals haven't always had to reflect significantly on identity with its majority culture roots so self is simplified into one or two boxes.

That's one dimension and many are on a journey to find themselves and understand who they are. And I would agree with the author and others that we can only discover who we really are in Christ, but I would add also that it can only happen as we enter into who God has made us and how we have been shaped and what it means to keep Jesus the center out of who we are. It doesn't help people enter into their God-given identity to establish as spiritual the absolute forgetfulness of their identity.

That – and I'm pretty sure Jesus worshiped out of his human identity, not in spite of it.

It is a beautiful thing that when we are in worship and we enter that space where we are freed from self-obsession and self-worship and narcissism to be in Christ and experience Him as the source and Master of our lives. But those moments are meaningful only in the context of our self, our sense of identity that He has been sovereignly at work shaping and revealing to us.

**We fix our eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:2) out of our self, our identity, not because we are in increasing measure forgetting ourselves.**

So don't self-obsess, but don't self-forget. Your worship will flow out of your sense of self, not out of it's destruction or disappearance.

But I rejoice that we can fully agree that our eyes must be on Christ alone if we are to be anchored in His presence and will. I have no doubt the worship and Lordship of Christ is a shared goal. I'm just pretty sure Jesus wants to bring my self to the party and not leave it behind.

**What thoughts do you have?**

**How would you frame sanctification as it relates to "self"?**

<http://www.brianvirtue.org/2012/02/why-self-forgetfulness-is-a-poor-paradigm-of-sanctification/>

## Phase Shifts, Femininity, and Strength

Jessica Lui  
November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Over the course several summers of women's times on Summer Projects, I've started to realize that I care a lot about women, femininity, and empowering women to step into the fullness of all that God intended femininity to be. But what does this mean?

For most of my life, I've associated femininity with weakness, but the more I learn about the creation account of Eve in [Genesis 2](#), the more I'm starting to see that being feminine doesn't exclude being strong. In fact, over the summer, Mushroom shared an insight from the Talmudic commentator Rashi on Genesis 2:18 argues just the opposite - **femininity is strength**.

<sup>18</sup> The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make [a helper suitable] for him."

The term translated, "a helper suitable" is ezer kenegdo in Hebrew, a term that is notoriously difficult to translate according to Hebrew scholar Robert Alter (quoted in Captivating). Ezer comes from the same root as "strength" and is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe **God as Israel's help** in times of trouble, as in Deuteronomy 29:33:

<sup>29</sup> Blessed are you, Israel!  
Who is like you,  
a people saved by the LORD?  
He is your shield and helper  
and your glorious sword.  
Your enemies will cower before you,  
and you will tread on their heights."

Kenedgo means something like corresponding to, or opposite. Taking the two words together, Commentator Rashi wrote,

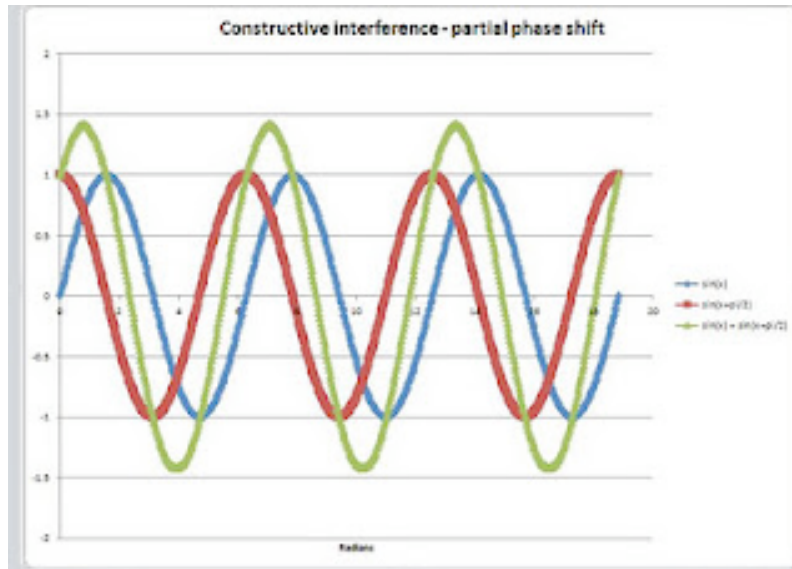
**"If he is worthy then [she is] a helpmate, if he is not worthy then [she is] opposite him, to fight him."**

In other words, as an ezer, a woman is a source of strength, but that strength can be used for a man or against a man. As I thought what that looked like, I, in my engineering nerdiness, found an "ahah!" moment through waves and phase shifts.

### Partial Constructive Interference

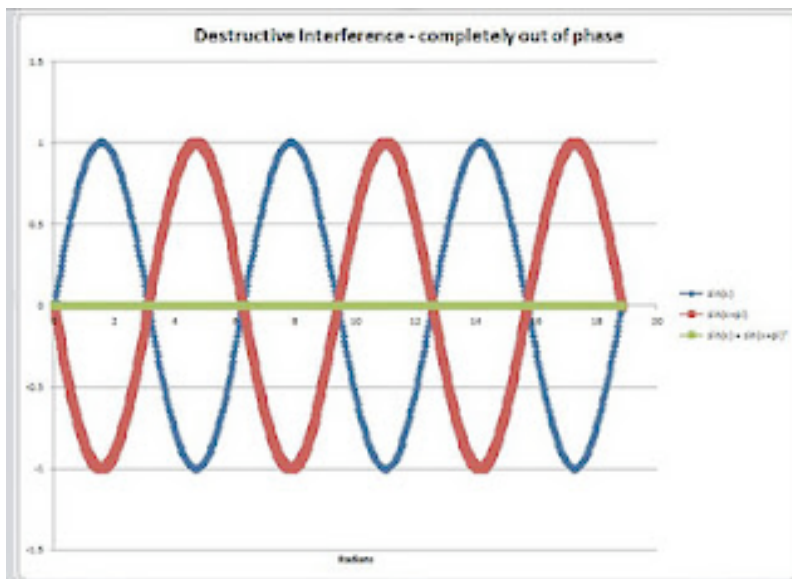
If you look at the figure below, the red and the blue waves have the same period and amplitude; they have the same shape, except one is shifted further along the x axis than the other (if you want to be technical, the blue wave is  $y=\sin(x)$  and the red one is  $y=\sin(x+\pi/2)$ ). The green wave is the sum of the two; if you were to take the y-values of the red and the blue wave at each x value and add them together and plot, the result would be the green wave).

In this particular case, there is some constructive interference - in other words, the resultant wave (green) has a larger amplitude (height) than either of the addend waves. Depending on how far you shift the red one, you can end up with a few different shapes and heights of resultant (green) waves.



### Maximal Destructive Interference - a strength against

The two waves are of equal amplitude (height) and frequency, and they are completely out of phase: where the blue wave ( $y = \sin(x)$ ) reaches a maximum at 1, the red one ( $y = \sin(x + \pi)$ ) reaches a minimum at -1. As a result, the sum of the two waves (green) is  $y = 0$  all the way through; they totally cancel each other out.

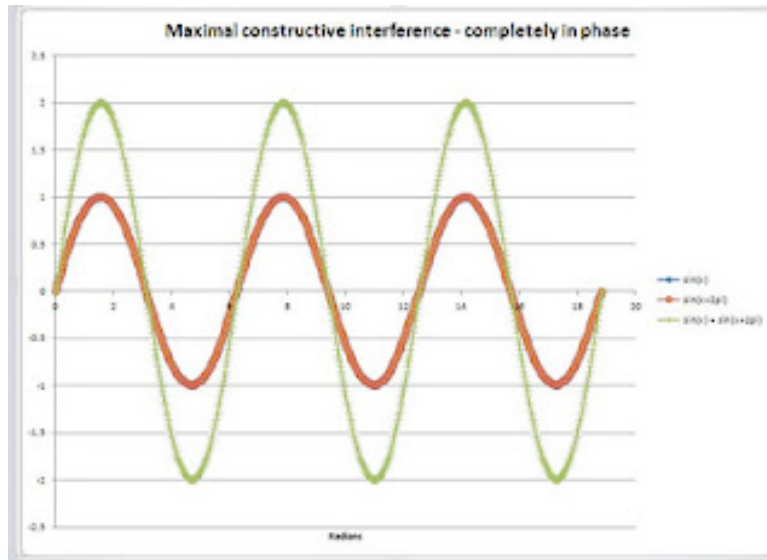


### Maximal Constructive Interference - a strength for

Although you can't see it, there are actually two waves here - a red one ( $y = \sin(x)$ ) and a blue one ( $y = \sin(x)$ ). The red one just happens to be completely on top of the blue one because the two waves are completely in phase, both reaching a maximum of 1 and minimum at -1 at the same time.

As a result, when you add the two waves together (shown in green), you have a new maximum of 2 and new minimum of -2; the amplitude of the new wave is double that of the originals. In the

same way, when two partners are totally aligned, their combined strength as a team will be much greater than their individual strength.



Although Genesis 2 is often discussed in reference to marriage, I think that we can broaden this idea of teamwork and building up vs tearing down to other types of relationships between men and women in work, family, romance, etc. **With strength comes responsibility, and I pray that I will be a strength for the men in my life and not a strength against them.**

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Sources:

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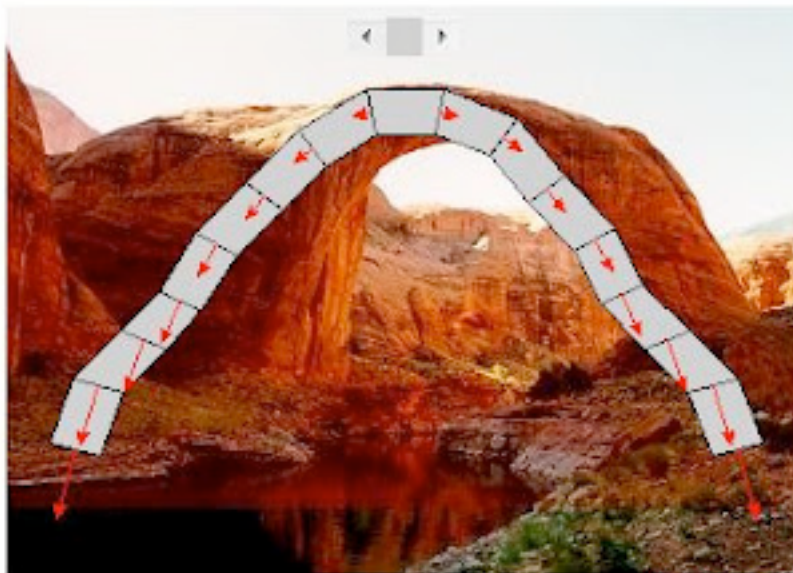
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## Physics, Feminity, and Strength – Newton's Third Law

Jessica Lui  
December 14, 2011

Some further thoughts from the last post - as I was reading more on the term "ezer kenegdo," I came across an illustration that one Jewish commentator makes: **a man and a woman holding up an arch between the two of them.** I realized that Newton's Third Law would fit well in this discussion both on the literal level about physics and as a metaphor for men and women in marriage.

Of course, being the engineer that I am, my first thought turned to free body diagrams to look at the forces acting on an arch and which direction they point.



If you were to segment the arch, there would be downward forces at the joints of the blocks

As you can see from this diagram, **the forces point down and out** from the legs, away from the center. You know this instinctively -- if I put a piece of card stock on the table and I told you to make an arch with it, how would you get it to stay upright? You'd have to push the "legs" toward each other; otherwise it would just slide outward until it was flat on the table again.



In physics speak, if we assume that the arch is symmetrical, then the forces required to hold up the card stock arch above must obey **Newton's Third Law**; they must be:

- 1) **equal in magnitude** and
- 2) **opposite in direction.**

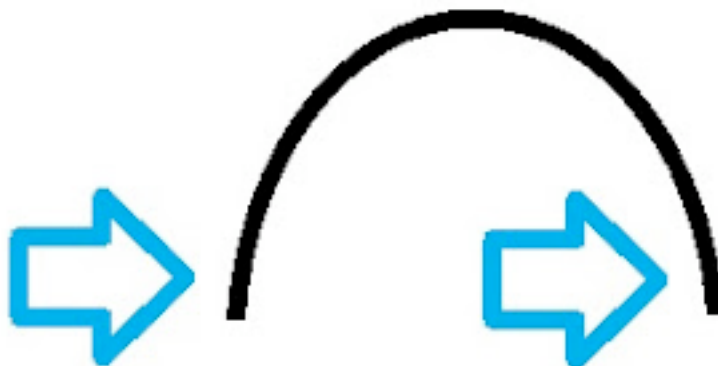
#### 1) **Equal in magnitude - "ezer" / strength**

In one of their seminars on marriage, Tim and Kathy Keller from Redeemer talked about the term "ezer" in regards to the role of the man and woman in marriage. Kathy noted that by definition, a helper can only help out of a position of strength.

Many times in English, the term "helper" ends up meaning "assistant." However, you couldn't possibly use "helper" to mean "assistant" when you're referring to God as Israel's help; it would be utterly ridiculous (not to mention wrong) to think of God as merely Israel's assistant when he's fighting for her!

I love that as women we are called to be strong! In physics terms, the arch would collapse if the pink arrow were significantly smaller than the blue one. This call to strength means that I don't have to be a princess bored out of my mind while I waiting for my prince to come rescue me from my tower and then end up as a pretty decoration on his horse. I am not just a cheerleader watching from the sidelines; I am a necessary contributing member of the team!

#### 2) **Opposite in direction - "kenegdo" / corresponding**



This card stock arch will not stand because the forces acting on the right leg are in the same direction as the forces within the arch.

If you and one other person were surrounded by the enemy, would you rather be fighting with both of you facing the same direction or back-to-back? Clearly, the most advantageous arrangement would be back-to-back, seeing what your partner cannot, minimizing blind spots and maximizing offensive potential.

Women, therefore, are vital members of this arch-bearing team because they can bring strengths that complement men's weaknesses and vice versa. Expecting women to perform like men or lead like men and hiding their feminine (relational, nurturing, group-oriented, etc) qualities would be like asking the back-to-back warrior pair to face the same direction. Shooting yourself in the foot, don't you think?

I am made to be an ezer kenegdo, a critical member of a team, a strength, not a liability in a unique way that men cannot be. In the words of Barnard and Elisabeth Eliot, let me be strong. Let me be beautiful. Let me be a woman.

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Sources:

Ezer Kenegdo: <http://godswordtowomen.org/ezerkenegdo.htm>

Physics of arches: <http://www.cpo.com/weblabs/chap3/archf.htm>

<http://ajourneywithjess.blogspot.com/2011/12/physics-femininity-and-strength-newtons.html>

# My Love-Hate Relationship with Mike: Lessons in Contextualization

Margaret Yu  
June 14, 2011

## **I have a love-hate relationship with *Mike*.**

No, not a person, but the lapel microphone I call my friend, *Mike*.

I love *Mike* because it helps me to have a voice. I have a soft voice and do not like to raise it. *Mike* allows me to speak in my own style without screaming. Specifically, I love *Mike* because it was made to give speakers the freedom to teach with hands free for other instructional purposes. (This was [Ray Litke](#)'s intent for the lapel mic when he invented it in 1957.) Since I love moving around as a speaker and speaking with my hands, I hate hand-held microphones. So, when *Mike* is working for me, I am able to bring God's messages while being freely myself.

I hate *Mike* as well, as it was made (I believe) for men in mind or those who wear stiff collars or lapels or shirts, and pants to hold onto that transmitter box. *Mike* has altered the way I prepare for speaking engagements for God since I know for *Mike* to work, I must wear clothing that will allow *Mike* to be worn on me for effect. This means, as soon as I hear from God that I am to speak at a venue, I automatically think of what to wear. (Okay, a little bit of this could be vanity?) Since I want to speak freely and be heard as well, I have to find clothing that represents me and yet can be strong enough to hold my friend, *Mike*.

This is no small feat. The times where I have forgotten to wear 'special speaking' clothes, i.e. clothing with strong collar or lapels or pants or skirts with a thick waist that clips onto that box, I have had to improvise with creativity so that my voice will be heard.

On quite a few occasions, I have underestimated the 'softness' of my clothing and have had to pay a price. (Oh, they were pretty dresses or blouses but not strong enough to hold onto *Mike*.) In these scenarios, I am about to speak within minutes and *Mike* is not cooperating with my choice of clothing. Desperate and wanting to be heard while moving freely, I have had to go find men in the audience who could help me as I borrow their belts or other clothing just for the presentation.

Usually these men are very bewildered, but once they understand, they become very compassionate. Often afterwards, they become very sympathetic to women speakers. We can laugh at my creativity as they bond with me and have entered into my world. Sometimes, these men even get the most out of my messages or presentations as a result of me borrowing their belts.

Then, there are times when no clothing can be found that are appropriate for *Mike*. Last December at our church women's brunch, I realized that only *Mike's cousin hand-held* was around, so I had to make it work. I just spoke and held on to the *cousin*; but I felt a bit limited and not quite myself. I have learned that I will ONLY hold on to the *cousin* as the last resort; for it is still not my true speaking self.

Though I have a love-hate relationship with *Mike*, I have learned a lot from it. *Mike* is a symbol for me of what things are like when they are NOT intended for you in its invention. I am pretty sure that [Ray Litke](#) was not thinking of women who could wear other types of clothing besides stiff collars and pants.

Oftentimes in life, when something is not designed with diverse individuals in view, it will not be as helpful. In fact, *Mike* is a great reminder to me that many things are not meant for me. And yet,

as a woman leader, I must figure out how to lead around it. Often times, many things are designed for men in mind and these tools or resources are more geared towards Western American values and realities that do not relate to my own community or minority context. With these tools, I must decipher or translate the good into my own setting. (How many of us have sat in classrooms, seminary auditoriums, leadership venues, or training centers where we have had to interpret the material for our own community, where we say to ourselves, *This would never work where I live, but I can tweak this...?*)

Yet, isn't that what women or minority leaders do! We must be creative and learn to work around things like my friend *Mike*.

And finally, as a person who is involved in leadership development, I must continually ask myself the question, *How am I creating venues and training with respect to diverse audiences?* I must think about their context as I plan on creating tools or resources, being vigilant in creating materials and growth ideas that fit into each person's context as much as possible. I must not assume that they will all wear stiff collared shirts or soft pastel dresses. I must contextualize. No one size fits all.

Once we intentionally design tools with that in mind, we will see the importance of creating space and place for their realities to be acknowledged and heard. Since no one size fits all, we serve in humility with respect for the dignity of another's stories and realities. We allow ourselves to enter into their story and not demand them to just enter into ours or to insist on having them subconsciously or consciously defend their existence. Instead, we respect their stories. Thus, we learn to serve and love more like Christ who entered into our world and became flesh, Grace, and Truth for us and made sense of our realities with us.

**So, if you are a minority leader, what symbols have reminded you that you are different than others?**

**And how have you been able to creatively go around these barriers that may short-circuit your own voice or power?**

**And if you are a person who is involved in creating LD material, what helps you to design tools with diversity in mind? What has helped you to enter into other's realities as you seek to empower leaders?**

**Finally, how has Jesus been a guide to you as you contextualize God's truths to diverse people?**

<http://mfacebloggin.blogspot.com/2011/07/my-love-hate-relationship-with-mike.html>

# Lamb Tongues

Vivian Mabuni  
September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

I push the grocery cart fast. Breezing through the aisles. Places to go, errands to run, lots of this and that on my mind. And out of the corner of my eye I see the yellow tray. It doesn't register until after I push past the glass case.

I'm brought to a complete stop. And then I back up my cart and peer in.

A yellow tray holding rows of purplish, pinkish somethings. I read the sign, part Arabic, part English.

## **Lamb tongues.**

Whoa. I've never seen that before. Then again, probably 40% of the stuff in the store would fit in that category.

I love this little store. Persian music playing overhead, stacks of Iranian phone books outside, a hefty bunch of red leaf lettuce sells for .59, Arabic pita bread for .75, the produce is fresh and the prices unmatched. But what I love most is hearing the different languages, and seeing people from different cultures. A woman from a South American country picked up a bag of dried brown oval-shaped things and looked at me, "What do you think this is used for?" I read the bag, part Arabic, part English: Dried Lemons. "I really don't know. But it looks interesting."

Here in the aisles of this little grocery store I find packages of things unfamiliar. But for most of the patrons, these same packages and smells bring memories of home and comfort food.

And I think about the smell of the pantry in my parents house and it's the same as the aisles of the Asian markets I visit. These markets have huge tanks of live fish in the back of the store, and duck tongues and chicken feet in styrofoam trays and plastic wrap, placed right next to the drum sticks and chicken thighs.

I grew up eating roasted watermelon seed, the cheek meat of fish, sea cucumber, and not only the sweet meat of the blue crab but also the green pasty eggs of the female crabs. These were delicacies we enjoyed on special occasions.

And I wonder if lamb tongues would hold the same place of honor in a meal shared by a Middle Eastern family.

Like snails and frog legs in France, or sheep brain in Central Asia. Raw fish in Japan.

I marvel at the variety of food, and languages and cultures and it comes to me all over again: **God is not an American.**

Sometimes I forget this fact and think that God only hears prayers in English or that it's the original Hebrew and Greek and then the English translation of the Bible. I read my Bible with American lenses, but the details that stand out to me as I read are often from a woman's perspective. And I wonder how the same passages would be understood by the people in cultures different from me or from a different time period. Or how their lenses would help me understand more richly and deeply the Word of God.

Darrin and I teach from the Bible in different contexts—Bible studies, retreats, conferences, Sunday school classes, etc. and I can tend to come across kind of dogmatic and black and white. But I have come to appreciate and respect Darrin's humble posture. He says, "The Bible has been around for thousands of years, translated, studied and taught by godly people through the ages. Who am I to say so emphatically what a particular passage says or means?" I don't think this means that we have a wishy-washy approach to Scripture, but I am challenged to continue to grow and evaluate how I read the Bible in light of culture and context.

I love how God displays His beauty and creativeness through different languages and peoples. And as His image bearers, we reflect who God is through who we are and how we live. I think that it is through bringing together all nations, ethnic groups and tongues that we are able to see Him reflected fully.

What an amazing God and what an amazing, diverse, wonderful and tasty world we live in.

<http://www.vivianmabuni.com/?p=365>

## **Section Two**

Culture & Identity Part Two:  
“Linsanity” Inspired Posts

# My Ethnical Dilemma

Jason Poon  
February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012

Eden was born, I looked TJ in the eyes and told her in all seriousness that I hoped our daughter would look white because her life would be easier. Her response will always be with me. There was no shock. No laughter. Just sadness in her eyes because she knew. She knew I was serious and she knew that my comment came from a place of suffering and past experience.

Fast forward a year and wouldn't you know it, my daughter is indeed very white looking. I am both amused and shocked by how much she resembles me and that she reflects a completely different ethnicity too. But despite her appearance fulfilling a wish of mine, I'm not oblivious to the fact that she'll still face some hardships over her ethnicity.

Back in college, when I was dating my former girlfriend, her father directed a comment about me that I'll never forget. We were both 20, still a few years off from graduating and marriage wasn't even a remote possibility. He sat his daughter down and told her his concerns about any future children we might have. How they'll be half. How they'll grow up with identity issues because of it. When we broke up, she relayed that information to me but I was too young and naive to realize what had really happened.

When my friends heard about it, they were immediately outraged, horrified and even stunned by what he had said about me for they saw what I couldn't see. I cannot even imagine how my parents felt when I told them what happened and their sense of confusion when I wasn't angry about it.

My parents met in England, spending over a decade of their lives away from Hong Kong, trying to make a better living out there. I recently learned that they moved back to Hong Kong before I was born because my father's career as a doctor had reached a dead end. He had been passed over for several jobs. Jobs which he was well qualified for, but wasn't even considered because he was Chinese. The jobs all went to Caucasians, most of them didn't even have the proper credentials. The final straw was when he was filling in for a friend and a patient refused his service because of his "black hair".

Being a parent myself, I can imagine the horrible feeling of hearing my child face a racist situation. The recent Jeremy Lin and "Chink in the Armor" incident has surfaced for me all the times I had been called a "Chink". I can recall the many times I had someone reference my "squinty" eyes, even though my eyes are actually pretty round. The one that hurt the most was when someone in a mocking accent tried to converse with me with "Ching Chong Ling Long Ting Tong".

The act of making fun of my language wasn't entirely that hurtful, but that it mostly happened in the company of people and nobody would come to my defense. Nobody would say anything. The most recent episode occurred when I had dinner at a friend's house. Even after conversing with his family for over two hours at this point, my friend's step elementary age brother blurted out "Wait, what's your name again? Ching Chong Wong Wang?" My friend stepped in as much as he could, but his parents just sat there, silent and slowly kept eating.

The message from these stories is clear to me: it's better to be white. You get the job even if you didn't work for it. You are marriage material. You don't get called names. So when I told TJ my hope for our daughter's appearance, I was wishing she wouldn't experience the same pains I did growing up.

Eden is unique. She comes from two cultures and two worlds. It has started to become more and more evident as I begin to show pictures of her deceased grandparents and teach her how to address them in Cantonese. Eden is not half. She is fully Chinese and she is fully American. But despite her outward appearance, she will not have that “easy” life that I wish for, partly because I won’t allow it.

Eden cannot grow up in this world turning a cold shoulder to my, no... her story. To the best of my abilities, I will raise her to know her Chinese heritage and her American heritage too. She will know of the plight towards her people as immigrants in this country. As TJ put it, we cannot allow her to grow up with apathy. Because she is both Chinese and American, she has a unique opportunity in bridging two worlds together bringing forth healing, reconciliation and understanding. But to do that she needs to have empathy for both cultures and that cannot happen without some pain and suffering in her life.

It pains me to say that, and while my role as her father is to protect her, I cannot shelter her from certain experiences in life even if it means it’ll hurt her. My natural instinct is to keep her from harm, but I would rob her of far more if I did.

<http://jasonandtjpoon.wordpress.com/2012/02/21/my-ethnic-dilemma/>

# Confession: I Haven't Been a Total Jeremy Lin Bandwagon-er

Whitney Chen  
[February 24, 2012](#)

**I have a confession to make: I've not been a huge fan of the Jeremy Lin craze.**

While at first this seems like a harmless, no-big-deal sort of thing, after I've reflected over the past few days, God's shown me more of the poor condition of my heart. And I'm embarrassed that I let that happen.

Initially, yes, I too was blown away by Lin's sudden success—more because as a first-time starter in the NBA his stats were unusual (I'm a retired Fantasy Basketball-er) and he continued to perform at an extremely high level! And though I definitely noted his Asian Americanness and appreciated commentary on the “soft bigotry of low expectations,” I could feel myself *refuse to identify with this part of his story*. I would not allow myself to feel any pride in the fact that Lin's Asian heritage was shedding any light onto the collective Asian American story. I even joked that Lin actually wasn't breaking any stereotypes within the Asian American context: he went to Harvard, he's excelled in athletics, he's a good son... etc.

**Then a completely separate event showed me that what was coming out of my heart and mouth regarding Lin and his success was cynicism and denial.**

An Asian American friend gave me some word suggestions as I tried to formulate some sentence on my prayer letter. Though they gave me some, they seemed confused. In my ignorance and idiocy I teased them for not understanding what I was asking. Later, I found out that they felt hurt because of my teasing and also because my teasing brought to the surface an insecurity of theirs regarding their grasp of English.

As soon as I heard of their experience, I felt deep remorse. But it wasn't just for them and for the pain I caused them. I started remembering how my mother told me she was teased for not knowing English and interactions where friends would comment on my dad's accent, and I felt I had to agree even though I never thought he had one. My friend shared how they felt for their own parents and how they may have been teased or taken less-seriously because of their understanding of English. And the experiences of people asking me how I learned to speak English so well, or when kids in school used to ask me how to speak Chinese and I felt the pressure to lie and make up sounds to make them leave me alone felt so real again.

**These very real memories and painful situations ARE a part of my story.**

Though I may not have directly experienced them all, they are instances that I *share* in as I choose to love my parents and love my friend. And though my heart desires redemption, I instinctively went to denial as the way to give the pain less power. By being cynical, I believe I become “untouchable” and “unfazed” by those types of experiences. But I realized that if I deny that those painful experiences matter, then I deny any chance of redemption and healing. I deny myself the possibility of forgiveness and growth, as well as deny others the possibility of understanding and reconciliation.

A ministry partner recently told me of their excitement about Jeremy Lin. And I'll never forget how she looked when after I said, “Yeah, it's pretty cool what's been happening to him.” Her eyes, very serious, her lips, trembling as she said, “No. It's about time people knew what it's like to be Asian American. You've grown up in a different generation, where there are more of us now. But in my life and your parents lives growing up, people didn't want to hear our story.”

I'm sad and incredibly sorry to say that **I was so careless**. And that I disguised my carelessness as being phlegmatic. I'm sad that I chose to serve myself and the "bliss" of ignorance instead of sharing in my friend's journey... his parents' journey... my own parents and grandparents' journey... Lin's journey. I'm sad that those experiences are present in my own life too and that we still have so far to go for those misunderstandings to become real arenas of dialogue and redemption.

But I'm grateful for grace through Jesus Christ forgiving me that allows my friend to forgive me and allows me to forgive myself. I'm grateful for the pioneering of people like my parents and that ministry partner. And I'm grateful too for those experiences as they continue to teach me how I *need to love and suffer with others*.

But most of all I'm hopeful for God to heal. I'm hopeful for His Kingdom to continue to be established on this earth... within the Asian American community and beyond. And ultimately hopeful for when there will be no more tears... nor pain... and the former things will have passed away... (Rev. 21:4).

<http://emazingepicedventures.wordpress.com/2012/02/24/confession-i-havent-been-a-total-jeremy-lin-bandwagon-er/>

# Jeremy Lin & Asian American Male Sexuality

By [Adrian Pei](#)  
February 9, 2012

I have to join in on the conversation here. First of all, I'm excited and proud to see all the attention Jeremy Lin is getting, not only because he's an Asian American and a Christian, but because he has worked so hard and shown such courage to get where he is today. And because, as described in the previous post, he has [serious talent](#)! That's just fun to watch.

Growing up, I feel like there was a lack of representation of Asian American men in popular culture, that I could look up to. And that kind of thing is really important in one's childhood... to see positive images of people you can relate to. I rooted so hard for Yul Kwon, the first Asian American winner of the hit reality show, Survivor, and felt so validated when he outmuscled and outstrategized his competition. And today, I love seeing Jeremy Lin tear up the court, proving all his doubters wrong.

At the same time, conversations about his success have forced me to remember some sobering realities that Asian American men face. After all, most of us aren't 6'3 and 200 pounds like Lin, or built with rock-hard abs like Kwon. No, we're more in the range of say, 5'7 and 150 pounds, give or take a few. We're usually the shortest, smallest, and quietest men in the room — and that's not lost on us, especially in a culture where manliness is often associated with physical size, height, and aggression.

Seeing Jeremy Lin in a Knicks uniform, I wonder how many people remember [Wat Misaka](#), the first non-Caucasian player in the NBA, who also played in Madison Square Garden for three games before he was cut. This [article](#) reveals his knowledge that being 5'7 was a disadvantage. In a [movie](#) made about him, it says that apparently Misaka had been a "big hit" among viewers when he played against the Harlem Globetrotters, and he was even offered a place on their team, but he declined. Did anyone think of him as a circus show?

Here's another part of the social reality of Asian American men: we're by far the [most bullied](#) of all groups among schools in the United States. Most of us heard the news about Private Danny Chen's suicide, after [relentless hazing and racist behavior](#) by fellow soldiers. A few [studies](#) in dating preferences have shown that Asian American men are the "least desirable" group among females.

So what do we do about it? Most of us are not getting taller anytime soon. Do we drink protein shakes at every meal, and hit the gym to build our muscle mass? Or learn to behave like an alpha male in order to be more desirable to women (or socially accepted), as Wesley Yang highlights in his "[Paper Tigers](#)" article?

Honestly, reading that article depressed me. Because in some ways, it was so true. I know so many Asian American men who react in one of two ways to their cultural and sexual identity: feel hopeless and depressed, or do everything they can to try to be like other cultures or people, who they feel are more "cool" or socially acceptable.

The article also depressed me because as a Christian, I don't think God gave me my body, with its height and bone/facial structure, by accident. It wasn't a mistake, and it's not something I should have to be ashamed of. I respect Jeremy Lin and Yul Kwon, and I am genuinely happy for them. But part of me doesn't want to be them. Part of me rebels against the idea that I need to prove that I can do everything other people or cultures can do.

That's what I believe deep down inside, but that doesn't always translate to how we feel. How can we feel beautiful, when there are so many forces at work portraying the opposite message?

So I guess I'm wondering a few things.

**What does it mean to be an Asian American man?**

**What does our culture think of sexuality, and how do we fit in that?**

Is there an example of an Asian American man in the public eye, who isn't unusually tall or athletic, and who is proud and brings his culture into what he does?

<http://nextgenerasianchurch.com/2012/02/09/jeremy-lin-asian-american-male-sexuality>

# The Rest of the Linsanity Story: Unstoppable Voices

Margaret Yu  
February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012

What makes the Linsanity story so wonderful is that the context of his story is such a triumphant showcase of what a person can do even in the midst of systemic bigotry or hurtful stereotype-casting. It is a story we all connect to as one of perseverance and going after the American dream. It is also an experience or story that many Americans, not just minority Americans can relate to: the story of being unnoticed and told that we do not matter (as an underdog) as much as others by society at large. It is the story of why we were so surprised by Jeremy Lin's success. The fact that we were all quite shocked by a no name non-drafted, non-division I baller becoming a big sensation in a big name sport that is predominantly populated by African Americans and Whites tells us a bit of the rest of the story.

The rest of the story is about how someone like Lin could have gone so unnoticed by so many capable scouts. The real story in the midst of even celebrating that at last, we have another great Asian American male role model is also about the AA community not having many positive role models or even being an integral part of our American history even though some of us have been in America for over 6 generations or more. What has remained silent is that many Americans and even Asian Americans do not know much about AA history. Due to various factors that are beyond the scope of this blog post, AA's are not as outspoken as other minorities and have not been acknowledged as much in mainstream American society or history.

For example, prior to Lin, most Americans could guess that there were not many AA's who have ever played NBA pro ball (4 to be exact), not many would know the rest of the story. This narrative is about Wat Misaka who was not only the first ever Asian American NBA baller, he was also the first person of Color to ever play in pro ball. He was actually a predecessor to Jackie Robinson whom many pay homage to.

But why is it that most Americans do not celebrate Misaka as much?

Do we know that his story is a great story of hope?

Do we know that he opened the door for people of Color to participate in pro sports as equal team members?

Do we know the rest of Wat's story?

Like Lin, even though Misaka's story has a great plot and ending, there is an important part of the story that rarely gets shared. That untold story is about how Misaka came out of so much adversity in order to be the first or be a role model for so many. Wat remained steadfast at a time when racism was the flavor of the day during and post-WWII. While Misaka's name is more famous now, Misaka's story did not begin with much fanfare or words, but with much abilities and ball skills.

Misaka was a winner like Lin. Although small in size (5'7"), he led his own high school to a state championship. As one of the few AA's who has ever played college basketball, in 1943-44, Wat helped lead the Utah team to a 18-3 record and a NIT bit and NCAA championship that was played (you guessed it) at Madison Square Gardens. Because he played for the Univ of Utah during that season nearby Camp Topaz, an internment camp of about 8,100 Japanese Americans who were forcibly removed from their homes and placed to reside behind barbed wires, Wat became famous especially to proud Japanese Americans in the tragic camps. Wat was the hope for his down-trodden community through his ball-handling. He reminded them of happier times

where the game matter and other things like racism did not hold them in prison. He also reminded them of the American dream that indeed we can pursue all that we desire no matter what color our skin.

After his bid for national championship, like other patriotic Americans, he went into the armed services for 2 years to serve his country. As an American patriot, he fought on the same teams as the men who interned his family, friends and community. Before returning home to a bid to play for the BBA (which became NBA) for (you guessed it?) NY Knicks due to the inclusiveness of then owner Ned Irish who also enrolled the first African American baller for the Knicks in 1950.

Misaka inspired many Japanese Americans to love basketball. That is why there exist in AA communities, a phenomenal called AA basketball leagues. These leagues were created for AA's to play in the midst of the reality of the subtle or blatant bigotry that can happen in the great sports of America. In these AA basketball leagues, many of these ballers found respect that they could not find in mainstream.

But the story does not end with the odiousness of racism in sports or America, it ends with the hope of a people finding their own voice in the midst of so much dishonor or disrespect. What is amazing is that from a quiet Japanese American community, we find people of justice prevailing to honor Wat for his role as a legend, not only in Basketball, but in American history. In 2008, a documentary film was made by an Asian American and her husband to honor Misaka's story. In August of the next year, Wat finally got the credit that was due him after sixty years of silence as he was inducted in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame for his role in basketball and history. Again, the triumph of creating the rest of the story so that others will know that indeed all of us matter is a great secret story of the Asian American community.

That is the untold story or the rest of the Linsanity story. Like Misaka, Lin's story is now told to millions in America and to the world, even though it began with meager undesirable plots. Lin's & Misaka's stories are about unstoppable courage, faith and voice in America. And we are all the better for these quieter stories. (I stand before you as an official NY Knicks fan now. I even know how to live stream the games. Unstoppable voices are stories that motivate me to live better.)

\*\*\*The film is called Transcending: The Wat Misaka Story directed by Bruce & Christine Toy Johnson.

<http://mfacebloggin.blogspot.com/2012/02/rest-of-linsanity-story-unstoppable.html>

## **Section Three**

**Leadership, Ministry, and  
Spiritual Formation Blogs**

# Servanthood and Gifting

TJ Poon  
March 11, 2012

In years past when I've heard people talking about their jobs and what they were gifted in how they want to make sure they were able to do mostly those things, I could get pretty annoyed actually. It seemed unrealistic to me and just an excuse to not do the things they didn't like to do. As a campus minister on the field, there are certain things you do, whether you're "gifted" in them or not. Or that was my thinking. (Gosh, I was such a sweet little thing. Ha.)

I feel like it's incoherent to say that we can serve in a way that's not out of "who we are". That was a lot of weird language but what I'm saying is: **anytime we're serving, we're serving out of who we are as people.** It seems logically impossible that this isn't the case.

But what most people usually mean when they say they want to work and lead out of "who we are" is their giftedness, passions, or strength. And honestly, I think that's an incomplete picture.

"Who we are" can be a lot of different things and it is not just giftedness or strength or what is life-giving to us. For example – since my parents' deaths, I have been handling every single bit of estate stuff and legal hoopla, even though I'm the youngest sibling, because part of "who I am" is being who I need to be in order to survive and do the things that need to be done.

Two things on the topic I'm thinking right now: (subject to change at any moment)

**We are responsible for bringing who we are into whatever tasks we're doing**, even if they aren't our favorite, in whatever ways possible and appropriate, and even if we can't do that in a way that gives us life...

**A part of who we are includes hopefully having some motivation** (compelled toward the vision, love for teammates...) that makes us willing to work in areas that aren't our strengths when the situation requires it.

I think this is where people can easily be taken advantage of. When there is a group of people who are only willing to serve out of "who they are" and take that to mean what they are naturally good at or gifted in, I think there are usually certain others who end up filling the gaps over and over again. It adds another dimension to maybe what servant leadership should look like in community.

We can be very self-serving when it comes to empowering ourselves sometimes. And completely unaware about the degree of impact those actions can have on those who are willing to serve - whether they are natural servants or the compulsively responsible.

**Perhaps it would be fitting to say that "who we are" can be reflected just as much in what we are refusing to do for the sake of the community as well as in what we get to do in our own strengths and passions.** Such a reminder about "who we are" may be quite humbling to us in those moments where we can only see ourselves through the lens of our own greatness or satisfaction.

I also believe this can be a huge issue in multi-ethnic contexts because I think individualistic cultures are more likely to expect or demand that they only work out of giftedness whereas members of more communal cultures would end up filling in the gaps time and time again. Now that I think about it, I think I've seen this.

**How are you living out of who you are in a way that is stewarding yourself and also serving your community and the bigger picture when needed?**

<http://www.brianvirtue.org/2012/03/tipoon-servant/>

# Movements, Mission, and Motion

Brian Virtue  
August 21, 2011

This post relates to **Movement**. Peter Steinke in “A Door Set Open” references **Sydney Carter** who authored a hymn a few decades ago called “Lord of the Dance” (apparently not connected to Michael Flatley and the Riverdance) and who did some writing about life and ways of living in fullness – **from the vantage point of movement**.

He writes,

“As Carter proposes, **we can live our Christian lives in one of three ways: inertly, reluctantly, or freely**. Our lives can be inert, uninspired, a passive going-through-the-motions with no thought or choice of our own that thrusts us forward. Or we can move reluctantly; that is, only if we are nudged or badgered. Our heart either is not in it or less than half of it is. The third movement is freedom, being a willing and engaged participant. We dance with the stars.”(99)

I found this fascinating because ministries or missional communities in my world and in many places are referred to as **“movements.”** The language indicates that there is something transformational and directional – they are going somewhere. They are in motion. They are not static, not inert.

The language and vision of movements is appealing because it has a connotation of freedom – the organic and willing motion towards the desired direction. Though sometimes there is “motion,” Carter notes it can be “reluctant” motion. It lacks life, spirit, and freedom. Reluctant motion to me is usually performance driven or guilt based motion, which is often reinforced by the lived out values of leadership that places motion at any cost ahead of free and inspired motion.

**Steinke though adds something** to Carter’s framework that I think is helpful and instructive for the modern leader and minister. He writes,

“In addition to the three movements Carter lists, I propose a fourth movement related to bacteria that I referred to earlier–**tumbling**.....We need to remember that **tumbling**, though it is not directed, is the very condition necessary to adjust course.” (99)

Steinke connects his observation to a larger metaphor related to the human body and biology, but he notes that there are times where proper “movement” means a season of disorientation (to use the term in the way Brueggemann uses it). **Tumbling, as he calls it, means there are times where organizations must enter into disorientation and feel the reality, ask the hard questions, and through struggle and search, renew its sense of self and purpose – all so it can “re-orient” itself towards an authentic and true future reality or vision.**

Steinke, in context, is addressing leadership failures and insecurities in times of transition, tumbling, or disorientation. **People so often want to fix things quick that they rob themselves of the potential wisdom and vision gained amidst seasons of disorientation that can fuel an alternative future reality.** They simply refuse to tumble.

In my own history and observation, leaders who refuse to tumble immediately go back to the tried and true practices of the past and try to recreate the past instead of lead authentically into a truly new future that resonates with reality. Yet the number of leaders who can lean into the tumbling and lead people through it with humility and connection are very, very, VERY few. Most try to get out of tumbling ASAP or deny that any tumbling is taking place.

There's a lot of people trained to get stuff done, but not many have been or are equipped to be the type of people who can lead people through seasons of tumbling that result in a hopeful, alternative reality.

Tumbling can be fruitless if we can't manage our anxiety and lead community well through it. But tumbling, when viewed from a larger perspective, is a time that can include incredibly purposeful and deep motion that ultimately will result in what Steinke captures as "dancing with the stars."

I've seen this in my own life and in others who have navigated periods of depression. Some people try to escape it and numb it and ignore the silent or hidden truths calling out for attention. The result is inert or reluctant living. **Those who enter into it, entering into the hard questions with God's grace, frequently find themselves restored with a new clarity of who they are (identity) and purpose and vision for their lives.** I believe the same process holds true for teams and organizations, yet it's much harder to lead a group into tumbling that perhaps just one's self.

**How does the metaphor of "motion" speak to you about your approach to life and how you view times of uncertainty, transition, or confusion in ministry?**

**What is required of you to lead yourself and others through seasons of "Tumbling"?**

<http://www.brianvirtue.org/2011/08/movement-mission-and-motion/>

# Ask At Least TWO Questions

Tom Virtue  
September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011

My wife has a lot of wisdom about a lot of things, but when it comes to thinking about and discerning the emotional intelligence of leaders there's no one that I trust more. One of the things that I've heard her say dozens of times is that, "Leaders need to have at least wrestled with their basic security, identity, and belonging issues to be ready to lead effectively." As with a lot of things, I agree with her more and more as time goes by and I see how what she says is consistent with reality.

One of the arenas where leaders can negatively influence is when they haven't dealt with their "basic security, identity, and belonging issues." It is when people they are responsible to supervise bring new ideas to them (or challenge an existing idea, or want to give feedback, or are troubled by something, etc.). Why? Because new ideas challenge existing ideas, and feedback challenges how something currently is being done.

That can be very threatening as leader so that is when those "basic security, identity, and belonging issues" come to the surface. Sometimes leaders try to justify themselves, maintain stability so they don't have to relate to change, or just don't have the energy to consider something new. Whatever the reason, if they don't listen, the end result is that everyone loses in the process – the organization, the discouraged initiator, and the leader's credibility.

I've recently been thinking about how many good ideas don't get the proper attention (i.e. listened to, considered, etc.). I'm feeling it because I've been on the receiving end where my ideas weren't fully considered, but that got me thinking back to several times when I was on the other side of the equation and I didn't do the listening that would have been helpful, appropriate, and a demonstration of servant leadership.

On the Epic Leadership Development team we've been reading "Orbiting the Giant Hairball" by Gordon MacKenzie. He describes how this dynamic takes place in a whole company as he shares about his experience at Hallmark. Does this sound familiar to you at all?

"Unfortunately, while the heart of Hallmark sings the virtues of creativity, the company's intellect worships the predictability of the status quo and is, thus, adverse to new ideas. This incongruity creates a common corporate personality disorder: The organization officially lauds the generation of new ideas while covertly subverting the implementation of the same ideas. The consequence is that, on any given day, umpteen people at Hallmark, responding to official corporate invitation, come up with concepts for new methodologies or fresh, original products. Then those ideas, by nature of their newness, are deemed fundamentally unseemly by the same authority conglomerate that asked for them in the first place. This makes for a lot of frustrated ideamongers."

To me this isn't just an exercise in theory. I happen to be in a place where I relate to a variety of people who bring me ideas, feedback, and input. I don't want to perpetuate what I'm afraid I've done in the past at times and what I see holds us back at times. As a result I'm implementing a guiding principle for myself and it will be something that I will try to encourage other leaders I coach to adopt.

When an idea, feedback, or input is brought to me I'm committed to asking at least 2 questions to gain some understanding.

Why 2 questions?

I've realized as I've had ideas critiqued or turned down without any questions that it was clear to me that the people responding didn't really even understand what I was aiming for. I don't want people to walk away thinking that I've written something off without even really understanding it. I won't commit myself to say yes to every idea, or agree with every item of feedback, but I'm committing to asking at least 2 questions to try and understand more thoroughly! If you're working with me – hold me to it!

**Discussion Questions:**

Think of an idea or thought from your past, that excited you enough to share it with your friend, leader, or team. Did you feel they took the time to listen and ask questions, before moving to judgment?

Name an idea, thought, or piece of feedback you've heard from somebody else in the past month. How did you respond to it?

<http://resources.epicmovement.com/ask-at-least-two-questions/>

# Self-Absorption Part One: Self-Obsession & Narcissism

(How We See Ourselves & Others)

Adrian Pei  
January 19, 2012

What Is Self-Absorption?

***What does it mean to be self-absorbed?***

Is it the same as selfishness? Narcissism? Self-promotion?

Or is it just the result of the overwhelming circumstances of life?

**First, I want to say that I feel totally inadequate to write about this topic.** There are many times I've been the worst culprit of what I'm exploring here. And I'm still in process on most of this, so this is just the first step to get the topic out there, so others can help me make sense of it.

**Second, I'm shocked at how little discussion there is about self-absorption.** It's one of the most common dynamics I've seen in ministry and life, and yet I don't see a lot of clear leadership over the topic. I can guess why... it's hard to recognize and hard to point out, in our own (or others') leadership and lives. It's complex, as there's not just one manifestation of it, but many.

So I want to begin by exploring self-absorption from three angles in the next three posts. They will include:

**Self-obsession & narcissism** (how we see ourselves & others)

**Self-servitude, busyness, & self-control** (how we serve ourselves & others)

**Self-promotion, culture, & integrity** (humility, boldness, and stewardship in a changing world)

Well, here we go. First post is below...

## Self-Obsession & Narcissism (How We See Ourselves & Others)

When the Wall Street Journal published the article, "[Why Chinese Mothers are Superior](#)," featuring excerpts from Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, it seemed everybody had a reaction — from agreement to judgment to anger. ***How can you say one culture has a better approach than another? How could you ever call your children "garbage"?***

Later, Chua professed that her book had been misrepresented, and *Tiger Mother* was intended as a memoir; almost a confessional, of her attempts and failures in parenting. Self-mocking or not, Chua benefited from all the publicity. Her book shot up the New York Times bestseller list, and the WSJ article generated more than 7,000 comments, [more than any other article](#) in the history of the publication's website.

What was revealed through this controversy, wasn't too far from what was captured inside the pages of the book — that Chua, as one New York Times [reviewer](#) put it — "never fails to make herself [the] center of attention." **Here was one of the clearest examples of narcissism.**

On a certain level, one might think, "*Narcissism? What could be more selfless than parenting?*" **But it's so easy to take something that should be about somebody else, and make it**

**about oneself. And that's at the heart of self-absorption: always wanting or needing to see oneself as the center of things.**

Maybe it's competitive parenting, in enrolling one's children in every special class, hoping they will be considered "gifted" or "advanced," because that's a sign of one's own success in raising them. Maybe it's in pushing them to learn more quickly than they seem to be developing, because it's embarrassing to always be "one step behind" in conversations with friends and colleagues. I once worked as a high school counselor, and still remember when one father asked me, "How many vocabulary words are you assigning to my friend's children to learn? Give my son twice as many!"

This temptation can be insidious among Asian Americans. A healthy wish to provide one's children with every opportunity one did not have, turns into competing to succeed through their achievements.

But narcissism doesn't just appear in parenting. It shows up in dating relationships that use the other party for one's own pleasure, image, or status. Or work projects that become about one's own advancement in position or power within an organization. So if we can't see how a relationship or project will help us, or if it doesn't give us the regard or involvement we want for ourselves, the temptation is to disengage. The common question (before making decisions) becomes, **"How will this help me?"**

Or self-absorption can be found in everyday interactions. I once spent the better part of a 90 minute lunch listening to an acquaintance talk about himself, without him asking me even a single question. And I don't think he even noticed! And this can happen online also, as people are tempted to over-focus on their own social media profile or website. Sometimes people seem to be so consumed by their own interests and world, that they struggle to see outside of that. It's often not necessarily malicious. But the results can be toxic, if we don't recognize and do something about it.

**So what can we do, considering that all of us are prone to self-absorption?** I think much wisdom can be found in the mythological tale that originated the term, "narcissism."

According to the ancient Roman poet Ovid, Narcissus was a hunter renowned for his beauty, and exceptionally proud. Knowing this, the goddess Nemesis attracted him to a pool, where he saw his own reflection in the waters and fell in love with it. Unable to take his eyes off the beauty of his image, Narcissus died.

This story reveals one very simple lesson: when we are self-absorbed, we simply don't recognize it. After all, that's the very definition of self-absorption. **We need to have people in our lives, who will help us identify the problem, and then have the courage to tell us.**

In Narcissus' tale, he had many followers, but their admiration only enabled his dysfunctionality, and ultimately his death. One of the most tragic characters in this myth (who few hear about) is Echo, a nymph who fell in love with Narcissus, following him around the woods. After he shunned her, she spent the rest of her life pining away in heartbreak, crying until all that was left was her voice.

When I read this story, I can't help but think of all the pastors and ministry leaders who have influenced so many lives, but are some of the loneliest people on earth. Surrounded by followers who support (or repeat) their every word and position, as Echo did, they are crying out for friends who will challenge them and say what they really need to hear.

**A great example of such a friend** comes from one of my favorite movies, *Shadowlands*, about the life of author and philosopher C.S. Lewis (played by Anthony Hopkins). He had developed a relationship with Joy, a blunt American (played by Debra Winger) who was an admirer of his work. After they had grown closer together, Joy confronted Lewis about how much of his lifestyle

served to boost his own ego, as a teacher and speaker and writer. She told him, “I’ve only now just seen it. How you’ve arranged a life for yourself, where no-one can touch you. *Everyone that’s close to you is either younger than you, or weaker than you, or under your control...* I don’t know that we are friends, not the way you have friends anyway.” She had identified the **central problem of narcissism, which is thinking that other people exist to serve our needs, make us look better, or otherwise help us achieve what we want for ourselves.** And that can be found in any parent, leader, or public figure, if they don’t take proper care.

Of course, Lewis didn’t like hearing Joy’s message, and it shook up his world in a good way, as he began to see his self-absorption. But this only happened because Joy loved him enough to see the insecure and lonely man behind the famous author. She saw that behind all his brilliant ideating, Lewis was just a child in the world of honest and intimate relationships.

**I think leaders can learn a lot from Lewis’ example.** You don’t have to be a renowned author to struggle with the challenges of a public platform that can lead to self-obsession — especially in this age of social media, blogs, and the Internet. You don’t have to be a brilliant philosopher to fall in love with your own ideas, skills, or doctrinal positions... whether you’re a leader in education, business, or ministry. How tempting is it to surround ourselves only with people who will tell us what we want to hear? How tempting is it to treat other people as a supporting cast to our wishes and dreams, especially when they shower us with respect, attention, and encouragement?

But deep inside, we long for more than that, don’t we? We long to be known and loved for who we really are, in all our flaws and insecurities. We long to be in true community that challenges us to grow. We know that we need other people, not to further our ends, but because they teach us shades of life we couldn’t see on our own. What would it have looked like for Narcissus to have had a friend, like Lewis had in Joy, instead of Echo, who only enabled his vanity and isolation?

So what is the key to confronting toxic self-absorption?

**The first step is recognizing its presence,** in whatever areas of your life it may appear. None of us are immune, and I have to constantly examine myself as I make decisions relating to my family, work, online activity, and much more. Do you have people in your life who will be truly honest with what they see in your life? Do you have mentors in your life, or anyone to help keep you accountable? Do you seek that out?

**Second, as you identify your struggles, bring others into them.**

They may have no clue that you feel lonely or isolated, since they see you surrounded by friends and apparent support.

**Finally, be willing to be a friend to others, who may be struggling with these things as well. Be willing to have the hard conversations.**

The stakes are high. Don’t forget that the story of Narcissus is incredibly tragic, as it ends in his death. In some versions of the myth, he commits suicide. Self-absorption has its roots in too many stories of leaders who leave their congregations or jobs because of some affair or scandal, as they seek for an intimacy they couldn’t find. It results in too many parents who disown their children who never lived up to their expectations, and children who spend years healing from that trauma.

As humans, we were created to think not just of ourselves, but of other people. Healthy, mutual relationships testify to the incomparable joy that comes from caring for somebody more than ourselves. Through true intimacy, we grow far beyond what we could ourselves imagine. Through true community, our small worlds are expanded.

***So what do you think? What else can help us recognize, and be set free from an unhealthy view of self and others?***

**Questions for further reflection or discussion:**

In what areas of life (parenting, work, online interactions, etc.) do you find yourself the most prone to self-absorption? What are some of your honest struggles with this?

Before you make decisions (i.e. about your schedule, priorities, or work projects), how much do you find yourself wondering or asking, “What will this do for me?” How do you see this impacting your life and leadership?

Think of three people in your life who are not impressed by you, but regularly tell you the truth (i.e. are willing to disagree with you, say things you might not like to hear). What steps can you take to seek this out more? Do you have mentors who keep you accountable?

Knowing what you know about the dangers of isolation and self-absorption, who else in your life might be facing these temptations? How can you support them as a true friend? Consider sharing your own struggles with them, or addressing some of these issues in your family, team, or organization.

# Self-Absorption Part 2: Self-Servitude, Busyness, & Self-Control

(How We Serve Ourselves & Others)

Adrian Pei  
February, 2012

**The tyranny of the urgent.** Many of us have heard of the phrase. In the busyness of life, the task list grows, the inbox overflows, and it's all we can do just to keep up. The **urgent** rules our decisions and actions, rather than what's most **important**.

What fails to get highlighted, though, is that **what's most urgent is often what's most selfish**.

Think about it.

When life gets full, and we have little to no margin, what will come first?

Our own needs. Self-servitude. One might call it the "tyranny of self."

Of course, on a certain level this is understandable. We often can't serve others effectively, if we're not in good shape ourselves.

But I'd point out two things here.

First, *self-servitude too often becomes a pattern in our lives, that can and will define how we lead and relate to people*. Yes, there will be seasons when circumstances force us to prioritize taking care of ourselves, whether it's illness, a newborn in the house, an unexpected accident or project, and so on. But if we find ourselves consistently putting our needs ahead of others, whether in work or in our families, we shouldn't just blame the circumstances of life. Instead, we need to look more deeply at our hearts, and the way we approach leadership (and life).

Part of what lies behind a self-serving dynamic is an **underlying struggle for control, fueled by a lack of ability to handle the anxieties of life**. For example, one of my teammates frequently describes "task management leaders" who relate to their responsibilities primarily with a view to check boxes, and accomplish tasks as quickly and painlessly as possible. So often in doing things this way, however, they are driven by what will make their own lives easier, and by a desire to avoid the anxiety that comes with task and communication build up. But if this is our leadership paradigm, how can we truly see beyond ourselves in order to serve other people, or a greater good?

**More often than not, this approach leads to short-sighted, oversimplified, and self-centered decision making.** Why? Because long-term thinking about complex issues, and what will truly serve other people, sometimes creates more work and takes longer. And the last thing a task management leader wants is *more* on his or her plate.

This is a form of self-absorption that's slightly different from the self-obsession of narcissism. Here, the question isn't so much "What will this do *for* me?" (as in the last [post](#)), but rather, "What will this do *to* me?" In contrast, a servant leader will ask, "What is the right thing to do, or what will be best for others or the greater picture, regardless of how it affects **me**?"

The second thing I want to point out is that *busyness is often self-imposed, and that too can be selfish, though it's rarely seen in that light*. One thing I've noticed while working in ministry, is how many people enjoy being busy, because it's a sign of productivity and worth. Since there are so many needs around us, it's quite possible to fill our time and schedule with activities and

commitments, just to fill our need for validation. But as described earlier, busyness can inhibit our capacity to truly serve others, and often by filling our task lists compulsively, we've effectively *chosen* to create our own lack of margin!

**So what to do about this form of self-absorption, that consumes us in our own worlds, and prevents us from true servant leadership?**

One thing I've been learning this year through one of my coaches is a new way of thinking about *self-control*. So often, we look at self-control in light of resisting evil urges, or even shutting down emotions. But I think we need to start seeing self-control as a loving discipline of servant leadership, whereby **one resists temptation to max out one's capacity with self-serving or self-absorbed projects**. I believe self-control means a refusal to make decisions solely by what makes our lives easier, whether at home or at work.

For me, that means a number of things. It's having the maturity to discern what I'm **not** called to do, though I'm tempted by an opportunity, or flattered by somebody's request to do something. In the ministry world, that's harder to do than we might think, since our jobs require us to be fairly versatile in speaking, writing, and teaching on a diverse range of topics. It's being able to consistently say no (and that means very often!), in order to focus on our biggest priorities, and leave enough margin to be able to not only respond in a timely manner to the needs of others, but to [anticipate](#) those needs and provide the kind of quality leadership that people deserve.

*Note: One small example of something that Jenny and I do to fight against self-absorption: every night when we pray together, at least 75% of the time we make it a point to pray for somebody else besides ourselves. It's really hard to do this, when life is full and we are consumed with dozens of our own concerns, but we've made it into a habit. And we've actually found it often feels freeing to think and care about others during these times. It brings perspective.*

When I think about the past decade, there have been far too many seasons when I was in survival mode, and I had little margin to serve anyone or anything outside of the projects that were ruling my life. If I'm honest, that was self-absorption... **how could I possibly have been in a position to provide thoughtful or timely leadership, when all I could handle was finishing the tasks in front of me?** And I see this in ministry leaders everywhere. Its effects are clear — their responsiveness in communication slows, they have problems following through (or settle for shortcuts), and their relationships suffer, whether at work or home.

You know the craziest thing, though? At the end of it all, many of us shake our heads and simply say, "That's life!" as if this has little to do with our choices, or approach to leadership and life. Some may even view their busyness with some twisted sense of satisfaction, that they were so "in demand" that they just weren't able to keep up. But that's a totally self-absorbed mindset, and even more than that, it's just plain **wrong**.

Again, **don't read this as claiming it's somehow wrong to be busy**. We should be intentional about using our time towards effectiveness. But if we're not careful to exercise self-control, we can easily end up in a pattern of self-servitude, where we can't see outside of our own world of task-elimination. And that can quickly become a **very small world, that prevents us from perceiving or embracing bigger leadership moments and opportunities**. And **who pays the price, when we miss these moments? Not us. Those we serve.**

I hope I'm communicating well enough, that this isn't just about time and priorities. How we serve ourselves and others ultimately stems from a much deeper place; it does flow from [how we see ourselves and others](#). In so many self-serving decisions that are made, do you see the undercurrent of power and privilege (and sometimes even entitlement) that's there? But God holds us accountable, for all we do **and** neglect to do.

Consider these words from one of my favorite passages, Ezekiel 34:

*“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel **who only take care of yourselves!** Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock... therefore, because my shepherds **cared for themselves rather than for my flock...** **I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock.** I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.”*

I get goosebumps when I read these words. Because of their truth, and how humbled it should make every leader who reads them. God isn't looking at time and efficiency paradigms; He's looking at our hearts! This is a stewardship issue... and if we fail to serve others because we're too preoccupied taking care of ourselves, that's an abuse of leadership power. **Let's never underestimate what we're entrusted with in leadership. Never.**

So the next time you hear the phrase “tyranny of the urgent,” don't just assume it's due to the inevitabilities of life. If we're honest, our leadership and life might be ruled by a “tyranny of the self.” For the sake of others and God... and for our own sakes, let's have the courage and integrity to reevaluate how we're approaching life and leadership. Like all forms of self-absorption, the problem often has more to do with us, than we realize.

**So what do you think?**

**What else can help us become less self-absorbed in the way we serve?**

**Questions for further reflection or discussion:**

List a few things in your life that are most non-urgent and important. Now list a few things that you consider to be most pressing and urgent.

Looking at both lists, how much of each pertains to serving you and your needs? How much pertains to serving others and their needs? What kind of conclusions can you draw from these observations?

When have you felt like you were in “survival mode”? How did it impact your decisions, the people around you, and your leadership?

How often do you find yourself thinking, or evaluating things by the question, “What will this do to me?” as opposed to “What is going to do right by others?” If it helps, think about various leadership situations you've faced (i.e. a significant decision to be made, an underlying problem or conflict that's been brought to your attention, an opportunity to platform or serve another person, etc.).

To what degree is busyness a source of pride for you? Which, if any activities or responsibilities might you have taken on mainly to feel productive or useful?

What kind of steps can you take to build self-control, so as to maintain enough margin to truly serve other people?

<http://www.adrianpei.com/?p=1387>

## Self-Absorption Part 3 - Self-Promotion, Culture, and Integrity

Adrian Pei  
February 6, 2012

**Do you have a blog?**

**Do you use Facebook, Twitter, or any other social media?**

**If so, did you know that you are a spokesperson?**

You are responsible for stewarding a platform that has influence, whether or not your own voice seems significant to you.

So what are you about?

Who or what do you represent?

These are questions I wrestle with. And I suspect that many others do, too. **But do those questions themselves seem presumptuous to you? Self-absorbed?**

There's no question that the world of blogs and social media can lead to self-absorbed behavior, as people use Twitter or Facebook to promote their own accomplishments, or repeat others' compliments of them (for everyone else to see). In most Asian American and other cultural settings, it's worse than a faux pas to put oneself before others like this... it's shameful. It's self-promotion. But when people do that, they aren't trying to brag, or aren't completely full of themselves... right?

**To be honest, I don't think we really know what to do with all of this.**

After all, the world has changed. We can now write things online with the click of a button, that we would never have said before in person. Or at least, in the past we had a few minutes to reconsider, as we saw the faces of the people we were addressing.

We live in an age of unprecedented sharing of information, where each of us can speak to hundreds and thousands of people from behind a computer. And people are reading.

**So what do we do?** Ignore social media, and all that's happening there? Never speak up and put ourselves out in public? Close our eyes and semi-apologize, labeling everything we share as "shameless plugs?" Or throw caution to the wind and inundate people relentlessly with our online presence?

As you can see, there's a lot behind this that is worth exploring.

Let me start with this. Although I respect people who choose not to use it (and their reasons for doing so), I am absolutely a believer in social media, and it's not just because it's effective. It's a way that people relate and communicate with one another, like it or not. It's already shaping the next generation of leaders and organizations around the world.

I could put it even more strongly. **I think we have to shift from treating social media as "cool" or "modern", to treating it as a matter of leadership.** I'll try to elaborate.

This past summer, one of my [coworkers](#) gave a seminar called "Social Media 201," where he discussed a number of cultural shifts in the way that people access information. The first shift was to **feeds**. For instance, Facebook and its stream of updates is a feed, as is a blog's

subscription feed... or even an e-mail. It's basically anything that gets information to people, so they know it's there, and can read and engage it if they want.

The central insight behind the informational shift to feeds, was that *people aren't looking for you anymore*. They simply won't spend the time to type in the web address of your Facebook home page or blog, when there are hundreds of other sources of information that are being streamed **to** them. So what to do? **You must find ways to seek out people, not wait for them to come to you.**

There's a leadership and personal lesson there. First, you can't lead if you're completely out of touch with the way others are communicating and connecting. It's not about whether you like technology, or feel adept at it or not. If you want to share your experiences, or gather feedback or insights from others, you have to be where people are. It's that simple.

Second, here's a personal lesson I've learned. **If you're not willing to put yourself out in public, you lose all the positive things that can come through that, in addition to the negative.** For instance, my writing and work is part of my own growth in stewardship as an Asian American who wants to use my opportunities, education and skills to do something good for others, and in the world. Can't it be irresponsible (and self-absorbed, actually), to be so self-conscious to never use one's voice for anything, even for good causes?

Let me just say, I'm an introvert and social media is **not** natural to me. On many days of the week, I'd rather stay invisible, and certain times after I write an article or put myself out in the public eye, I feel like hiding under a rock. But if I believe in what I'm writing about, is it a bad thing to share it with other people?

Sure, it would be great if other people could be constantly looking to share other peoples' stuff, so we could all avoid the discomfort of self-consciousness and apparent self-promotion. But that's just not how the world works these days... people rely on feeds to know anything's even out there. Someone's refusal to be public, while certainly a respectable choice (*note: some people are not interested in that, and I do respect the spirit behind that*), won't necessarily be perceived as a matter of arrogance **OR** humility. People just won't know they're there, period.

Okay, now is the time for a HUGE "BUT." BUT...

This is only half of the story! Too many people stop here, and then feel they can share whatever they want, as much as they want. This is where our conscience can be a helpful guide in discretion, so we're stewarding our public platform and voice with humility and integrity. There is a huge value to thoughtful restraint in online venues!

**Here are some questions I've found helpful for myself, in navigating these complex waters:**

***What is the focus of the content I'm sharing about?***

***Is it ultimately all about me, and what will help me? Or does it point attention to other people and issues?***

This is one of the biggest questions, around which I see a lot of confusion. Someone could write about nothing but their own life, passions, struggles and dreams on Facebook, Twitter, or on a blog. And that could certainly reflect a fair level of self-absorption... no question about it. Or that same person could be using those venues to bring attention to other people, causes or issues that are bigger than them, and so on. But there's a big difference between the two situations, although the same person is writing and sharing that content. In other words, just because somebody shares their **own** content, doesn't mean they are only trying to promote themselves, regardless of the focus of the content. That would be a very cynical way of looking at things. But I think there's

a healthy way to steward one's voice, to point beyond oneself — to things that matter to other people.

This ties a little bit to a deeper question:

***Who or what do I represent?***

It might seem like a strange or silly question, but think about it! Because sometimes when we realize that we represent not just ourselves, but our family or organization or culture in certain contexts, our responsibility is to them as well. So we may be called to put ourselves forward as spokespeople at certain times, when everything inside of us might be screaming, "I don't want this!" I've been in some situations where I knew that my actions to represent others would appear self-promoting, and I knew that nobody would understand my true motives. And I had to be okay with being misunderstood. In a strange twist on self-absorption, sometimes we have to lose our self-consciousness in order to put ourselves forward and do the right thing in those cases.

But that doesn't mean I'm not prone to the temptations of ego. I definitely am! In that light, here's another question:

***Do I feel like I'm entitled to a platform or voice, or is it a responsibility that sobers me?***

Especially if we're minorities or have felt like we haven't had a voice for most of our lives, we can become intoxicated with the power we can have, once we start to use our voice. If we've fought for the opportunity to speak or represent something, we can feel a sense of entitlement for our platform. **But we MUST NEVER let that happen!**

***As our voice or influence grows stronger, we must be:***

- more (not less) aware of our own sinfulness and greed***
- more (not less) willing to give away any power we might have, in empowering others, and***
- more (not less) proactive in being interested in other people, rather than ourselves only***

That's because it will only get harder. If we're drawing people to ourselves, or find that people are coming to us, we better be taking **EXTRA** care for who we are, and what we represent. Influence is something to steward, and it will test us to the core of our integrity. It should. Are you thinking about that? Are you ready? Because as I said before, you have a platform and a voice to steward (especially if you're a leader), whether you know it or not!

***Am I wrestling with what it means to be a spokesperson, or to have a platform?  
Am I seeking help and prayer?***

To some degree, I think it's healthy to always wrestle a bit with these issues. From what I've seen of others, it's usually not good to become too comfortable. One thing we can always do, is to ask for help and prayer. I believe God will honor that.

***How freely do I give, in addition to receiving? Am I willing to serve and platform,  
as much as I enjoy being platformed by others?***

On a practical level, I fight against self-absorption by trying to maintain a healthy balance between how much I focus on myself, and how much I focus on others online. That means reading and commenting on other people's blogs as much as I do on my own. Or working to platform somebody else's work as much as my own projects (it's helped for me to work on a [resource site](#), and staff community website, where highlighting others is the point). Also, it's helped for me to collaborate: half of the talks I've given, and major articles I've written have been with other people. This is actually an intentional value that author Henri Nouwen applies in his

book *In the Name of Jesus* — for ministers to speak in pairs, rather than alone when in front of an audience — to avoid the pitfalls of a “temptation to be spectacular.” What a great way to counteract self-absorption!

**So to conclude, it’s not simple to navigate the ethics of self, in an ever-changing world.** And self-absorption is a subtle and tempting foe, that can lure us from different angles. We can mistake it for false humility, a boldness that stems from entitlement and ego, or other manifestations. But through it all, we’ll be headed in the right direction, as long as we’re wrestling with these questions, and don’t minimize the power each of us has. Because we all have a platform, so it’s not a matter of **whether** or not we have a voice. It’s a matter of **what** we choose to do with it.

***So what do you think? How do you navigate these issues?***

***What do you struggle with online? What have you found that helps you?***

***What do you think gets mistakenly labeled as self-promotion?***

# Don't Confuse Harmony With Intimacy

Vivian Mabuni  
[December 5, 2011](#)

She was walked down an aisle—*the* aisle, scattered with colorful fall leaves by a dad who prayed for her and for that moment from the time she was born. The sky was brilliant blue. Her mom and dad, both godly and faithful, gave her away. Family and friends watched with misty eyes as vows were shared and the symbolic two color sand was poured into the vase. Layer upon layer the sand represented lives impossible to separate. The supernatural exchange when two becomes one. Every detail had been attended to, and both the bride and groom, like every bride and groom through the ages, entered this new chapter of life with every intention of a marriage that would stand the test of time.

Just weeks earlier a group of women, young and old, sat in a beautiful home and lavished gifts of kitchen supplies for her home and advice for her heart. One by one we shared out of our experience and our hopes for her future with her soon-to-be husband.

This is a paraphrased version of what I remember sharing:

## **Don't confuse harmony with intimacy.\***

Marriage is hands down the hardest relationship you will ever experience. Just because two people love God and each other doesn't make for an automatically "good" marriage. It takes work and intentionality. You may be tempted to "just get along" and think that you have a good marriage.

The danger of pursuing harmony is that getting along may be at the expense of sharing what you want, what you need and most important who you REALLY are. A good marriage is one that is marked by intimacy. Intimacy is knowing and being known deeply. And it's messy. It often involves conflict. And vulnerability. It's risky. Humbling. Sometimes scary. It takes an investment of TIME to listen, untangle, explore, understand, reconcile. But intimacy is incredibly worthwhile. Your marriage is worth fighting for. True harmony comes from the hard work of pursuing intimacy. Don't settle for short cuts.

And so the challenge for them, for me, for us, is to pursue intimacy in our relationships. Invest the time, the hard work of knowing and being known. A relationship book I have found to be helpful and recommend highly is "How We Love" by Milan and Kay Yerkovich.

What are your thoughts about harmony and intimacy?

\*I've been sharing this sweet little nugget at bridal showers the last two years. Truth is, it was **Leila** (of the Awesome Threesome) that came up with the initial idea. She is ever wise in the relationship department. I have taken her thoughts and elaborated a bit and then woven in some of my own. But trust me, if you want incredible relational insight, seek this amazing woman out. I can't tell you how my life has been enriched because of her wisdom, example, and deep love for God. Those of you privileged to know her can attest to these truths.

**This post is dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Matt and Nicole Harrelson with love and prayers. May you enjoy a marriage that enjoys true harmony because of deep intimacy....**

<http://www.vivianmabuni.com/?p=14>

# Courage to Enter

By [TJ Poon](#)

November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Up until recently, I have not sought out information on the Penn State scandal. I have picked up more than bits and pieces, though, as I am almost constantly connected to social media, and my husband has followed the story with interest.

Quite honestly, I'm sure that this avoidance has been purposeful, if even on a somewhat sub-conscious level. The nightmare of sexual abuse is one that I know from personal experience and, though I have pursued and obtained much healing, powerful waves of emotion can easily overtake me when things like this come to light. It is a feeling that I deal with as it comes, but not one I often go looking for.

There is so much to be sad, angry and sickened over. Whether it is a coach, family member, clergyman, or a stranger, the effects of sexual abuse are immediate and catastrophic to the victim's soul. There is no human punishment befitting of the one who commits such an awful crime against the body, soul and spirit of another. I have been in sadness as increasingly horrific details emerge from this specific case, and more than a little angry when I think about the silence of those who witnessed some of the abuses, but said nothing.

Apart from the particulars of this current and well-publicized scandal, I am once again rocked by the pervasiveness of sexual abuse. The [statistics](#) are horrifying: 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be abused before the age of 18. Those numbers are nauseating, and probably low. Dan Allender says [here](#), "I know that everyone in America is relating directly and intimately with at least one person who has been sexually abused. And damn it, we don't talk about it." Once confronted with the reality of the proportion of the population who has been abused, the silence of our culture is deafening. If you haven't already clicked through to the Allender [post](#), please read it for his thoughts on this phenomenon.

What has been weighing especially heavily on my heart and what I keep coming back to that usually receives little-to-no airtime, is the home of the abused child. If the numbers above frighten you as much as me, these are equally troubling: the vast majority of survivors are abused by someone they know. (94% in one [study](#).) The implications are enormous.

Certainly, there are many cases of sexual abuse that are "random" acts of evil and not in any way brought on by a caretaker's negligence. But often, a predator looks for a person whose soul is not nourished at home, leaving them vulnerable and unprotected to the perpetrator, and without a safe place to turn to after the damage has occurred. You can imagine the psyche of a child who undergoes consistent, lasting torment at the hands of another and doesn't say anything: before the attack occurred, that child's voice had already been lost.

There is nothing more unsettling for a child than the feeling of powerlessness that comes with the knowledge that those who are put on this Earth to protect them have either contributed to their abuse, turned a blind eye when they saw it, or given them no place to turn when they were violated. Facing the reality that those who are supposed to protect us have abdicated their role and left us to the wolves is profoundly damaging. In fact, it is more than some can bear. I have heard women talk about their families, how wonderful, loving and supportive they are, yet also admit that they have never spoken of their sexual abuse to their parents. There is a major cognitive "miss" here. The betrayal of the family is not acknowledged.

I am not just talking about a parent who sees abuse occurring and refuses to intervene. That indeed happens, but betrayal can come in a number of other ways, many insidious, that render

the family incapable of providing the protection that God intended. Picture a child whose father tells him to “quit moping” when his countenance is fallen, because the family system doesn’t allow for pain to be experienced or acknowledged. The father is too uninvolved and selfish to look into the source of his child’s agony. Or a mother who is unstable and needy. Her ability to function depends on the apparent harmony and relative functioning of the family. Obviously, these are not places where a child can legitimately turn for protection, yet “Abuse victims rarely admit the near ‘impossibility’ of securing help from their family of origin; rather they blame themselves for not seeking help.”<sup>1</sup>

When I first began to face my abuse and name it, this is where most of my reflection occurred and the source of my most profound pain. It was as if the scales fell off of my eyes, and I began to face for the first time that my family was not a place of safety, that my parents were committed to many things more deeply than my protection, and that the dynamics there had actually “set me up” to be abused. I need to be clear here in that absolutely no fault can be removed from the youth pastor who initiated a physical, sexual relationship with me. The responsibility of his actions belongs to him alone. I am not removing the blame from the abuser-proper. Rather, the unsafe family is a fertile breeding ground where the evil of sexual abuse can grow more easily and often unchecked.

If the numbers of children who have been abused is on the rise, and if the vast majority of those abuses are from a family member, friend or acquaintance (in other words, not a stranger), then it seems we are losing the family as a place of safety. We are losing parents who really parent, and therefore we are losing childhood, and children. I have no solutions, but I do know that fighting this darkness requires that we move toward it, rather than cowering in fear, discouragement or denial.

We must begin to name our abuse and that of our friends, spouses and children. In that naming we will begin to give a voice to those who have been silenced; we will refuse to further victimize ourselves and others through denial; we will enter the story that up to a quarter of Americans are living.

Having the courage to enter the story is where healing begins.

<sup>1</sup>Taken from [\*The Wounded Heart\*](#), by Dan Allender

<http://jasonandtjpoon.wordpress.com/2011/11/17/courage-to-enter/>

# Maturity is Contextual

Brian Virtue  
January 23, 2012

Have you felt like there were some situations or places where you really felt like you were growing? Strong, healthy, empowered?

And then maybe you also find yourself in other situations or places, but you don't feel like those descriptions are true. Maybe there are places or situations where you find yourself weak, anxious, powerless, angry, or maybe even just young and immature.

I believe Maturity is Contextual.

What does that mean? Well it means there are some places you might actually function pretty maturely and there are others in which we find ourselves giving expression to various dysfunctions and immature behavior that maybe we had forgotten existed or that we're not aware of yet.

I think a majority of folks have a paradigm of maturity that is linear – you grow or mature and it's kind of like a static thing that you take with you wherever you go. You don't regress...you keep climbing the mountain of adulthood. It's kind of linear in that it's like a straight line on a graph. Maturity = growth and transformation over time.

I think there's a kernel of truth there. But we also in some ways are different people in different places. Each context or situation is a different emotional system. They are made up by the unique collection of people and players. What's important for this discussion is that each setting we might find ourselves in, the pressures upon us and the challenges to our identity and maturity vary greatly because dynamics change with different people. So authority relationships, family, gender, ethnicity and race, and host of other factors shape our experience of our contexts.

And you know what? Different situations often tap into different things. Sometimes we don't have to grow up in some places because people don't make us. However we can't get away with those same things in a different context because the expectations are different.

This is part of why even grown men and women can feel and act like children or adolescents when they return to their parent's home. Or maybe it's why even very mature and experienced leaders can't speak up in the face of perceived authority. Whatever it is – we don't act the same across the board. Therefore we develop differently in differently places, because those places call us to grow up in different ways (except for those places which work to not let us grow up at all in the first place).

I worked with short-term international mission teams for about five years so I got to work with students and staff of my organization before, during, and after significant and often intense cross-cultural experiences in various places around the world. It wasn't uncommon during a debrief or conflict mediation session to hear someone express in frustration, **“That wasn't me. I don't know what happened. That wasn't really me.”**

Now we all know that feeling and understand what's being communicated there. But I always tried to ask the question, **“Well, who was it then?”**

Sometimes we regress, a situation or team or relationship or dynamic draws out the worst in us. There's often flat out sin involved too as a result of immature reactivity. Usually there's also an exposure of areas that are immature – that haven't grown up yet. And it's hard to integrate those

immature moments, those childlike moments with those experiences in which we feel like we're on top of our game and where we feel good about ourselves and what we want people to see and experience from us.

Maturity is contextual in that it is through unique contexts and situations in which we are formed and shaped and challenged and exposed. Yet maturity is not purely contextual as we seek to integrate our sense of self, allowing us to become someone who is consistent, who embodies integrity and wholeness, and who can embrace the challenge to grow up as a result of whatever challenge that comes. I'm speaking here more on a developmental level rather than on the theological/sanctification level.

Who we are is not "somewhere in between" our best environments and our worst. Who we are is both. Our underlying character gaps and our immaturity or vulnerable to sin areas are exposed more in certain settings – and they should drive us towards grace and humility and learning.

But we should be mindful that in our best environments – we might have a false sense of confidence about just how far we've come. I'm not talking about pride per se. I'm talking about a monstrous blind spot that comes from failing to recognize that we function really well in some contexts and situations because our weaknesses are not tested in those moments or places as they are others. This is why people in power can go a long way and maybe never really recognize how many glaring holes in their character are really there.

So as you think about your own growth and development – recognize that it's fluid, it's environmentally influenced, and it's a sign of maturity to do the work of integrating your self as different contexts experience you differently. That's where you really experience grace and exhibit authentic humility as a person and leader.

**And remember this warning** – you might not be mature in the setting in which you function most. You might simply be lucky – lucky that you're set up in a situation in which your true character just isn't tested or challenged or exposed. We have seasons like that. But those seasons come to an end sooner or later and we'll have a test of our character and convictions. Our maturity then may be exposed both by the situation...and then by how we respond once we find ourselves in the light in new ways.

<http://www.brianvirtue.org/2012/01/maturity-is-contextual/>

# Stepping Off The Treadmill

Glennis Shih

Posted at Epic Movement Resources on September 27, 2011



I grew up in a very success-driven family.

My parents always stressed the importance of getting good grades, going to good schools and getting very good jobs (Of course, this meant becoming a doctor or lawyer!). Growing up I always felt like I was on a “success-treadmill.”

I had to work hard and get into the supposedly best-high-school-in-NY and an Ivy-league university. I had to graduate with honors to get into a prestigious graduate school or get a good job. I did whatever was necessary to do well: sometimes to the point of not eating or socializing with anyone. So, yes. My studies often prevented me from developing deeper friendships with others. Plus, I cheated a lot...and this got me in a lot of trouble. As you can imagine, running on this success treadmill left me always feeling exhausted, anxious and constantly fearful of failure.

It wasn't until I went to a conference my junior year of college that I even considered stepping off this treadmill. At the conference, the speaker talked about how people “stockpiled their resumes.” In other words, many people filled up their resumes to make themselves look good, not because they truly cared about those things but because it would get them a safe job. I realized I had been doing that my whole life!

But the speaker went on to share from a verse in the Bible which said: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.” I realized that all my life I had been conforming myself to the patterns that my family set for me, and the patterns the world set up. I had been conforming myself to what they determined was good or successful. I realized I had been too afraid to consider other alternatives. I didn't know what I was truly passionate about.

Then I read Psalm 139, which reminded me that there was someone who DID know! It was my Creator, and this brilliant God had written an instruction manual for my life called the Bible. Yet I wrestled a lot with God. I questioned whether His plans for me were really, as He said: “good, pleasing and perfect.” I knew that if I actually pursued what I was really excited about, my

parents would possibly disown me, people in general would think I was strange, and I would most likely live a financially difficult life.

But in my heart I knew that while I'd possibly be okay serving in a profession such as social work, I wouldn't be doing what I was truly passionate about. That is, to share with people where they can find ultimate hope and healing, through having a personal relationship with God. 5 years after I graduated, I joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ. Now, I'm doing what I love every day: talking to people about God and answering their questions about faith.

Initially, my family was very upset with me, to the point of practically disowning me. When I first served overseas, my parents told me to "go and never come home." My mom cried a lot and stamped her feet. My brother said to me, "You're going to regret this for the rest of your life."

And at first I had some financial difficulties, since as staff we have to fundraise our entire salary. But over time, God really provided: I've never received a short paycheck and my mom has grown so much in her faith through my decision. The most amazing thing is that my brothers, who have prestigious careers, have actually shared with me how much they admire and envy me...that I was able to do what I really wanted. I found it really poignant that my Heavenly Father knew better than anyone what kind of life would give me true purpose and security.

That's why I love my job, and I will continue sharing with people that they too don't have to settle for a mediocre, safe life. They can live an exciting life of purpose and meaning through a relationship of knowing their Creator. And my hope for you all is that you would experience that as well!

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Glennis talks a lot about her family. What is your family like? Do their opinions matter greatly to you in major decisions?
2. Describe a time you experienced being on a "success-treadmill."
3. What motivates you or makes you feel complete?
4. What would you lean towards: living a life that is "safe" but possibly mediocre or living a life that is "exciting" but possibly dangerous? Why?

<http://resources.epicmovement.com/stepping-off-the-treadmill/>

## **Part Four**

**“A Three Cultures Approach to Engaging Scripture and Cross-Cultural Ministry”**

**by  
Brian Virtue**

Culture is everywhere. In no small way it is in culture as well that we “live, and move, and have our being.” Culture and context provides the dimensions of meaning that bring truth into real life experience. We live and embody culture ourselves. We express it when we communicate. We lean on it when we are seeking to understand communication directed towards us.

Culture and context are central tenants to effective communication, whether we are sending or receiving. As we consider the Scriptures as God’s revelation, God’s communication, to the world, we should not be surprised that culture and context play a vital and foundational role in both the interpretation of Scripture and in its application to our lives, communities, and world.

In this article, I’m proposing that there is a strong correlation in how our cross-cultural capacity affects both our reading of the Scriptures as well as how we go about entering into ministry relationships and situations that are crossing cultures in some way. I propose that when we come to the Scriptures in study or if we are participating in ministry within a people group or context different from our own that we always keep in mind what I’m calling a “Three Cultures Approach to Engaging Scripture.”

In any given ministry context in which the Scriptures are being used to minister, there are often no less than three cultures involved that are influencing the fruitfulness of a given ministry opportunity. The challenge for us in personal study and in cross-cultural or multi-ethnic ministry is navigating these three cultures and worldviews so that God is glorified through our effort and posture in learning.

The aforementioned “three cultures” can generally be categorized as the culture of the Bible, our own culture, and finally the culture of the community or people group in which we are serving and ministering. I aim to briefly illustrate here how each of those cultural contexts impacts the process of Biblical interpretation and communication as well as draw out significant implications for the 21<sup>st</sup> century ministry and leader who ministers in an increasingly culturally diverse world.

### **The Culture of the Bible**

The Scriptures were written in cultural contexts. And point of fact, they were written by people who represent many different times in history and different cultures so it would be more appropriate to refer to the culture of the Bible as the “cultures” of the Bible. In the New Testament alone we are exposed to first century Jewish, Roman, Greek, and even a little bit of North African culture among others as we are treated to the story of Philip and the Ethiopian.

The “Word” as it’s called is an incarnated communication of God’s truth into real forms. Scripture was mediated through real and human people, whose own cultures and contexts are a part of God’s revelation to us in that we cannot access those truths outside of the context in which they are revealed. The authors of Scripture bring their identities and who they are as people, their perspectives based on their experience and place in society, and their locale in history in their writing. Just as Jesus was God incarnate as a first century Jewish man and carpenter, God’s revelation is incarnated through the written words of real people in the flesh. There’s a certain “fleshliness” to Scripture just as there was and is to Jesus Christ himself.

Approaches to studying Scripture can vary based on assumptions and convictions about what is important in the process arriving at God’s revealed truth. I was studying the Bible at a restaurant once and a young guy in his twenties approached me to talk about what I was doing. I told him I was studying some of the cultural context and background of a particular passage. After sharing that he too was a follower of Christ, he proceeded to then tell me “I don’t need to study and do all that. I have the Holy Spirit and He shows me exactly what the passages mean.” On the other extreme, all of us probably have stories of our encounters with people touting all sorts of nuanced knowledge and data that lacks both love and evidence of the Spirit.

As evidenced in my exchange in the restaurant, there are assumptions and beliefs that some clearly carry that allow them to bypass even basic levels of the hard work of understanding the

implications of culture and context on Scripture. And while we can be most grateful for the role of the Holy Spirit in illuminating God's truth in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is not a magical talisman that apart from diligence and study always unlocks hidden realities and dynamics that are embedded in a different time, context, and culture than our own. If we are assuming that every time we come to the Scriptures that God provides short cuts to get at what the Scriptures would have meant to the original author and audience, then we are mistaken. We must be willing to be learners as we cross into the world behind the passage as students and learners.

In most Bible study tools or resources, there is an effort to provide some cultural context. You no doubt have been encouraged at some point to ask the questions, "Who is the author?" or "Who is the author writing to?" and "When is the book or letter written?" These are really helpful and foundational for interpretive work; however, some basic logistical facts about the setting are not enough to shed light on the actual cultural forces that that inform meaning and shape the significance of what is going on in a particular passage. Culture and context include both the historical realities of who is writing and to what audience, but it also includes the behavioral and sociological realities that shaped meaning and provided the guiding parameters of life in their world.

When reading the New Testament, some sociological questions that need to be asked might be about what it meant to be a women in the first century in the Ancient Near East, or what might have been life like for a slave given that in the Roman Empire at the time roughly one third of all people in the Empire were slaves? Maybe even more helpful – what was slavery like in the Ancient world? Who were the people that had high status and power both in the Jewish world and in the larger Roman Empire? Who were those that had no status? Were these direct cultures in terms of communication or indirect? How do honor and shame systems work?

These questions often speak to the experience of real people in a real society blessed with its strengths as well as plagued by power imbalances and other dynamics central to how people saw themselves and others. Asking questions about power in society and how people view themselves and others in the landscape of their reality is just as important today as it would be for us looking back two thousand years. These are some of the places where we need to seek understanding if we are to really get in people's shoes – whether the sandals of those in the first century or the modern apparel we wear today.

There are so many questions to ask, that it can be quite overwhelming at first. Fortunately, there are many scholars who have done a lot of the work for us in understanding the cultural landscape of a particular passage or book in the Scriptures. What we have to do, the skill that is ours alone to make use of that no one else can, is to ask those questions as we are studying. And as we'll explore later, some of those same questions are just as important to ask today when partnering with or serving in a different ethnic or cultural contexts. Learning to explore the social and emotional worlds of people is an underappreciated skill in both Bible study and ministry.

Should we be discouraged in our reading of Scriptures that we are not "qualified enough" to interpret and learn from the Scriptures? By no means! Dr. Jeannine Brown of Bethel Seminary encourages students of Scripture saying,

"Without claiming absolute knowledge for our interpretations, we can attain adequate knowledge. Interpreters may not know everything, but they often know enough-enough to understand a text and to respond to it appropriately."<sup>1</sup>

While we aren't all called to be scholars, we all can become good question askers to keep us from overly cognitive or disconnected interpretations. We must remind ourselves to keep thinking about the culture(s) of the Bible and what the Scriptures meant to people in their original writing

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Jeannine. *Scripture as Communication*. Location 1335 Kindle Version.

and hearing – particularly as it relates to what people were thinking and experiencing at the time. If we don't we might find more of ourselves in the text than should be there!

### **Our Own Culture**

Engaging the Scriptures honestly with a view that it is communication embedded in cultural and contextual forms is truly a cross-cultural endeavor. Has that every occurred to you? That every time you approach the Scriptures you are crossing cultures? But it's true! Don't let your English translations fool you! While I don't always use some of the Ancient language I've studied, I do often just look at a Greek copy of a book of the Bible every once in awhile to see it's original form. Even just remembering that what you are reading was written in a different language originally can be a good reminder that there are probably some different elements at work than what we usually rely on today for understanding.

There are two sides to every cultural dynamic. If you've ever gone to another part of the country and had somebody comment on your "accent" it's a reminder that you're in somewhat of a different cultural context than your own. But beyond that, it's a fresh reminder that we have a cultural context of our own, one that we forget when we are going about our daily lives in that native context. Our culture to us is like water to a fish – it's what we've always known so we usually are not even thinking about it as we go about our daily lives.

For some of us, particularly those of majority culture, it can be really hard to remember that we have a unique culture that shapes how we interpret, hear, and feel about things we experience. But we must remember that when we come to the Scriptures to understand what God has to say to us, it's not the Scriptures that are culturally different – it's us that are different! We're the ones different from those that wrote or first heard the Scriptures in their own context. We carry our own expectations, values, and ways of relating to others into all of life. And if we aren't careful, we'll carry them into our reading and studying and application of the Scriptures as well.

Theologian Justo Gonzalez writes in *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes*, "The question of perspective is important for two complementary reasons: first, because it cannot be avoided; second, because it should not be avoided."<sup>2</sup> It needs to be recognized that our cultural lenses can both enlightening and dangerous!

As we each come to the Scriptures there are no doubt things from our own journeys and contexts that allow us to make great observations and connections that others might not make because they have different stories. Our lens can at times bring out or enhance God's word in our lives in beautiful and powerful ways that are also true to the meaning of the Scriptures. One example comes from Spanish speaking cultures. English does not have a plural version of "you" so many passages are experienced individualistic. Spanish speakers working off of Spanish translations experience some of the community emphasis and focus in many passages of Scripture that English speakers often miss.

Another example that I've been blessed by from my Asian American friends is the ways they recognize and see honor and shame in the Scriptures. I would be very ignorant to some of these dynamics on my own, but through their eyes I can access much more of what is being described by some passages and be blessed by the deeper social and theological implications that I otherwise would miss out on.

But our lenses also bring blind spots and bias as well that shield us from aspects of Scripture that our stories and our paradigms maybe aren't big enough yet for. In this way, culture is not bad or good in hermeneutics – but it is very present and active! A friend told me once that we should not be pursuing a completely ethno-relative hermeneutic (one in which our own culture is not driving things but meaning is completely driven by culture), but an "ethno-acknowledged" hermeneutic.

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<sup>2</sup> Gonzalez, Justo. *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes*. 15.

We don't want to strip our culture from the process, but we want to recognize the beauty of culture in the process as well as some of its limitations.

A traditional model of studying the Scriptures that most of us are probably familiar with is framed in the three step formula of Observe, Interpret, Apply. This is a helpful paradigm as an overall structure. However, this simple formula as it often is applied doesn't always help learners keep in mind the level of meaning that undergirds a passage, because it doesn't always remind people about culture. One step needed for both observation and interpretation that must be revisited regularly is the intentional examination of our own presuppositions that might have a bearing on how we see a passage. We have to look for where we might have blind spots or bias in how we're coming to the next. In other words, we must pay attention to beliefs and attitudes or convictions we might hold that may get in the way of a true interpretation of a text.

The more narrow our interpretive communities are, the less aware we may be about our assumptions. Or more simply put – the more we only spend time with and discuss the Scriptures with people like us, the more limited our hermeneutical lens is likely to be. For example, are we reading western paradigms of individuality into a situation where there is a more collective way of understanding self and community? Are we aware of how contemporary theological trends may be influencing how we read Scriptures? What are the ways we may be inadvertently squeezing a particular text into our own culture and context instead of seeking to look with fresh eyes about what was going on in that particular situation? We have to be aware that our “normal” is not the universal or historical “norm.”

When studying the Scriptures, we need to recognize that we're not entirely objective beings. Far too many of us, because we at times are greatly confident in our ability to be logical and objective, forget that we all bring a subjectivity to our understanding of Scriptures and if we can't learn and grow in setting some of those presuppositions aside to learn about how these passages would read or be heard in a different culture and context then we will be getting in our own way in the pursuit of interpreting Scripture.

An increasing number of scholars prefer the use of the term “De-contextualizing” when we come to the Scriptures. De-contextualizing implies that as we come to the Scriptures that we bring our own cultural assumptions in that pursuit. It also implies that the text itself is embedded in a cultural context. The process of de-contextualizing Scripture involves both examining and letting go of our own presuppositions as best we can that can undermine a reading of a text as well as the process of learning what a passage is teaching and revealing in light of its culturally rooted form. We de-contextualize in order to get closer to the original meaning of a passage, setting the stage for us to then do the work of re-contextualizing those truths to ourselves or another audience.

### **The Culture of Our Audience**

In that three step model of Observe, Interpret, Apply, Application is the step that is doing the work of applying the truths of Scripture to our own life reality or to the life reality of a particular audience. In recent history, application has been replaced more frequently with the word “contextualization” to recognize that the work of application is about embedding the truth of Scriptures in a particular context so that people are learning to follow Jesus and obey Him and His word within the contours of their own life reality.

Scholars are increasingly calling this part of the interpretive process “re-contextualization.” For majority culture ministers or lay people, contextualization does not always bring with it the reminder that in ministry today, our job as ministers is not to contextualize white applications to non-white contexts. But this applies to ministers of all ethnicities crossing cultures. Re-contextualization implies that regardless of our ethnicity or culture or background, the truth of the Scriptures can be embedded within our own contexts so that it can do its work of changing lives and redeeming culture. Texts of Scripture are de-contextualized from ethnocentric presuppositions (assumptions that our own culture is the center of the universe) so that original meaning can be understood and then these truths are re-contextualized for the sake of wielding

their transformative power through the Holy Spirit in a new time and place and with different cultural values and assumptions than from when the Scriptures were first written.

So you now see the progression of “Three Cultures.” We must first check the interpretive biases of our own culture as we are embedded in a particular context with particular perspectives and worldviews. Then we must do the work of crossing cultures into the Scriptures to learn about how God revealed Himself through the particular culture and cultures reflected in the time and writing and content of Scriptures. Finally, we must keep in mind our audience, especially if we are communicating within a culture (or cultures!) different to our own culture of origin.

If we are teaching in small or large group settings or just meeting with another individual – oftentimes there is that third culture at work. In large group settings you may have dozens of cultures at work! But to bring the truth of Scriptures to an audience that is different from you – which may involve generational, gender, ethnic, and other cultural differences – you will have to be intentional about learning those worlds and learning how the truth of the Scriptures might be most powerfully applied through the power and guidance of the Spirit.

### **A Three Cultures Approach to Ministry**

I conclude with an application of this model specifically to cross-cultural ministry. It has become more clear to me after serving cross-culturally for several years now that often our cross-cultural effectiveness in ministry reflects those same postures and skills that we must employ when we are doing the work of crossing cultures in the Scriptures. The degree to which we think about culture in studying Scripture seems to correspond to some degree with the way we think about culture in our ministry opportunities and relationships.

Think about the parallels between studying Scripture and doing ministry cross-culturally. Here’s a few that stand out to me:

- Both require examining your own cultural presuppositions or else you risk placing your own culture over the culture of that which you are seeking to understand and engage.
- Both require intentional cultural learning into both the obvious and not so obvious factors that drive perceptions of identity, community, and meaning. In short – in both our study of Scriptures and in our cross-cultural learning in ministry we’re called to put ourselves in their shoes and seek to understand what makes those different from us tick. What is meaningful to them? Both involve incarnational learning and humility.
- Both require time and patience.
- Both require a willingness to let yourself be challenged and corrected.

There are no doubt many more parallels, but many today are seeking to do cross cultural ministry with good intentions but without having developed a basic understanding of how to cross cultures and how to be a learner. Many don’t know where to start in that learning. I think one way that we can build our capacity for cross-cultural ministry is to be a cross-cultural student of the Scriptures.

But of course it goes both ways! Just as limited cross-cultural experience can contribute to naïveté, ignorance, or maybe flat out arrogance in studying the Scriptures, different communities expand our vision and help us see a more rich and complete rendering of the Scriptures than our previous biases have allowed and they allow us to serve others as God uses us to do some of the same things for them. The Scriptures can be increasingly freed from some of our less than helpful cultural projections and presuppositions and as a result they speak more loudly and more powerfully to us.

As we conclude Dr. Brown offers the following advice and wisdom as it relates to navigating some of the cultural factors in interpreting the Scriptures for personal and ministry application,

“The goal of understanding the author's communicative intention is a worthy and responsible goal. That we will not fully or perfectly reach it is no reason to give up trying. In fact, we should work diligently to hear as best as we are able the voice of Scripture that often contravenes our own. The truth of our locatedness in interpretation should, however, encourage humility as we come to the biblical text. Such a humble stance is a good thing, for it keeps us aware that our reading might be a misreading, our interpretation a misinterpretation. This prevents us from "allow[ing] [our] own readings to have a finality bestowed upon them ... a strategy that effectively subverts [the text's authority] and enthrones our `objective' readings in its place.”<sup>3</sup>

Studying the Scriptures and cross-cultural learning and ministry are a powerful combination. If we can pursue both at the same time our experience of the Scriptures will come alive and yield great power in our lives and ministries.

So next time you engage the Scriptures or the next time you engage someone of a different cultural background in a ministry or life situation, remember that three cultures are at work. Are you open to seeing how?

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, Jeannine. *Scripture as Communication*. Location 1332 Kindle Edition.

## **The Epic Movement**

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