



# PLUGGED In

CULTURE AND ITS SEDUCTIVE STORIES

**WELCOME**

*TO THE SECOND PART OF THIS WORKSHOP SERIES*



**Let's Pray**



# HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS RELATE TO CULTURE?



## WORKSHOP OUTLINE

1. What is culture?
2. The Religious Nature of Culture
  - A. Practices (Liturgies)
  - B. Stories (Gospel/Doctrine)
  - C. Groups (Community)
3. What now?



# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## A. A Definition of Culture

The original word “culture” has three different senses coming from its Latin roots.

- Firstly, *colere* which refers to agriculture - as in cultivating crops.
- Secondly, *colonus*, which has to do with inhabiting something.
- And finally, *cultus*, which has to do with honour and worship - think our English word, “cult”.

**There is an intrinsically religious aspect of culture** which we will look at in this workshop.



# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## SIMPLE DEFINITION

Culture is the cumulative and shared product of what people believe, value, do and make as *image bearers* of God in various times, groups and places.

# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## B. Result of the *Imago Dei* (Image of God)

In Genesis 1, we see God create everything and then *bring order* to the raw materials of creation by separating, organizing, and filling the spaces He had created to make them *functional, flourishing and fruitful*.



# THE CREATION MANDATE

And God **blessed** them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and **multiply** and fill the earth and **subdue** it, and have **dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:28)



# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



The creation mandate is the basis of culture:

- **Blessing** - It starts with His blessing given to all humanity
- **Procreation** - As humanity is fruitful and multiplies, we form new people groups who are image bearers meant to glorify God.
- **Subduing the earth** - we take the raw materials and potential of God's creation and harness them to make tools, technology, art, music and all the artifacts of culture.
- **Have dominion** - we maintain order over the earth resulting in governmental structures, set up just laws to order societies and care for our environment and wildlife.

# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## C. Culture after the Fall

I. The Goodness of Creation is not eradicated but **corrupted**

- The **structures** or material elements of creation are still good. The Fall doesn't make apples or wood or cats inherently evil.
- The **direction** or intentions of humans is now mis-oriented so that we don't glorify our Creator with the work of our hands, words of our mouths and affections of our hearts.

“Every cultural context is **structurally good**, but **directionally corrupt**. For this reason, we must live firmly in the midst of our cultural contexts (structurally), all the while seeking to steer our cultural realities toward Christ rather than toward idols (directionally).”



**Every Square Inch, pg 18**

Bruce R. Ashford



# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## C. Culture after the Fall

I. The Goodness of Creation is not eradicated but **corrupted**

So, while in this workshop I'll be pointing out and critiquing a lot of the corruption of the culture around us, **remember that culture is NOT inherently evil.**

# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## C. Culture after the Fall

I. The Goodness of Creation is not eradicated but **corrupted**

II. We become **idolatrous**

Our fundamental nature as '**worshippers**' remains unchanged after the Fall - we still work and act in such a way to bring **glory to something**. And so, **all cultures** will also **reflect the sinful idolatry** of that people group.

# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## D. The Culture Wars

It is often believed that secular culture is neutral because it rejects religion.

But I want you to see that it is actually **deeply religious**.





## Dr. John M. Frame

"It is interesting that the Latin term "colere"... also refers to religious service, and comes into English as cult, cultic and so on. **Culture and cult go together.** If a society worships idols, false gods, that worship will govern the culture of that society. If a society worships the true God, that worship will deeply influence, even pervade its culture."

# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## D. The Culture Wars

- Secularism/Atheism/Hinduism/Islam, etc produces a certain kind of culture.
- The Gospel also produces a certain kind of culture.

Therefore, culture is really “**religion externalized**.” It reflects outwardly what we value inwardly, it is how we worship and show what is really in our hearts.

# 1. WHAT IS CULTURE?



## D. The Culture Wars

### Today's Hostility

Our progressive culture seeks the kingdom without the King.







# Questions for Breakout

(5-10 mins)

- Do you sometimes feel tempted to dismiss all culture as inherently bad or embrace all of it as purely good?
- Have you ever considered culture as “religion externalized?” What are some ways you’ve experienced our culture’s idolatry or hostility?



# HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS RELATE TO CULTURE?



## WORKSHOP OUTLINE

1. What is culture?
2. The Religious Nature of Culture
  - A. Practices (Liturgies)
  - B. Stories (Gospel/Doctrine)
  - C. Groups (Community)



# 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



## A Thought Experiment



## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



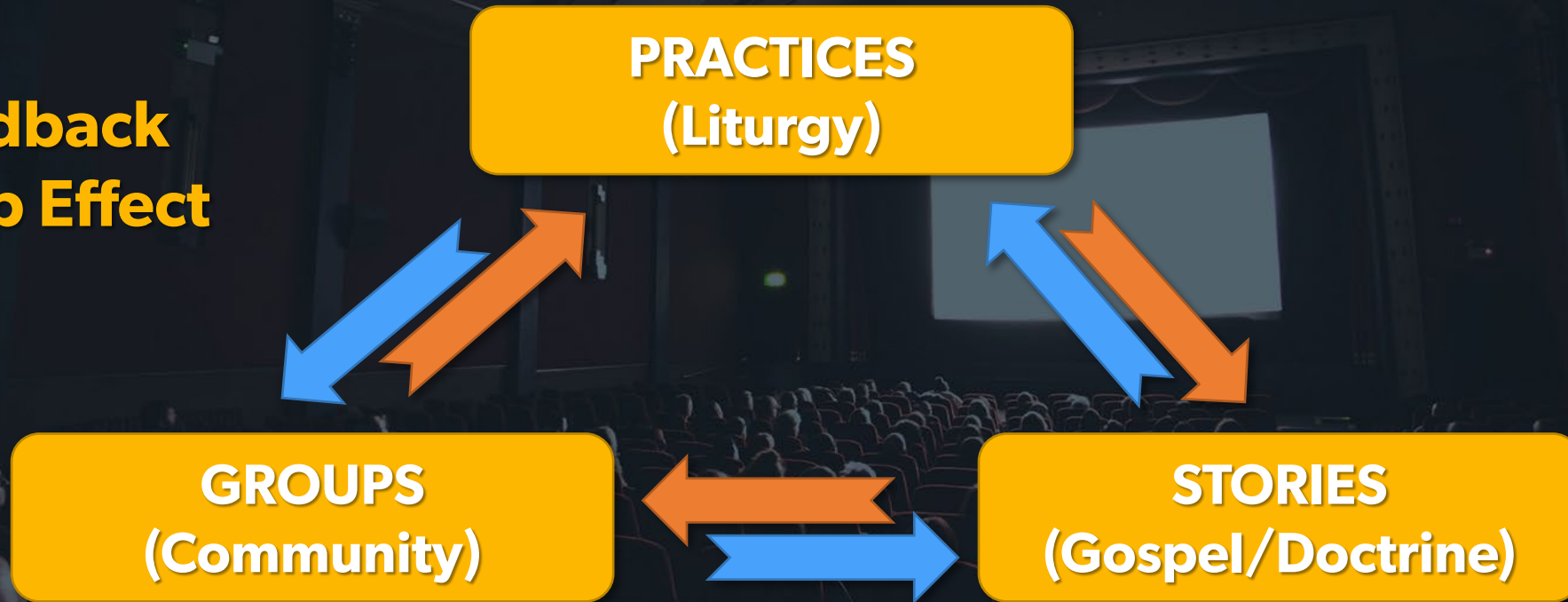
Culture is the product of...

- A. Practices** that form us (Liturgies)
- B. Stories** that give meaning (Gospel/Doctrine)
- C. Groups** that define us (Community)



## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE

**Feedback  
Loop Effect**



The culture 'disciples' us in very religious ways. Christianity offers us the true form of these things as a **disruptive witness** to the culture.

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

- Practice doesn't make perfect. **Practice makes permanent.** If you keep practicing the wrong thing, you won't become perfect, you'll just reinforce bad habits.
- **We are always times training ourselves for worship** - directing our hearts to desire and love some specific end. This is because we are a unified whole of body and spirit - **what you do with your body necessarily will affect your soul.**

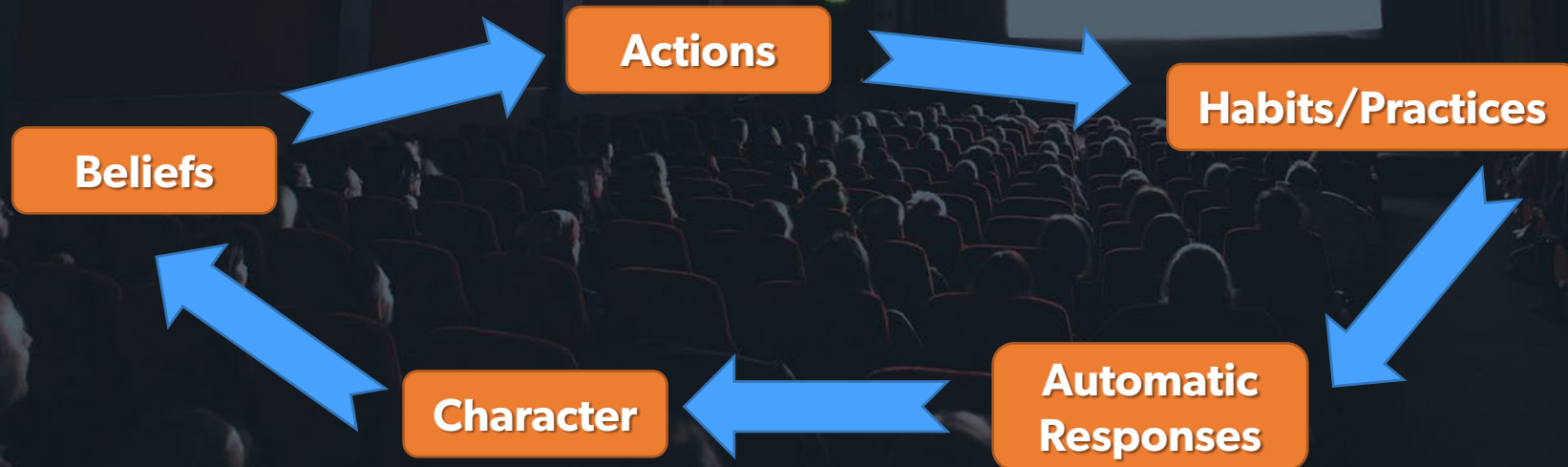
## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

#### I. Character Formation

The chain of development for character formation usually looks something like this:





# 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



## A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

### I. Character Formation





## Prof. James K.A. Smith

***“People should be able to put goals into gear through external means and thereby ‘bypass the will’ entirely.”*** Since research indicates that **only about 5 percent of our daily activity is the product of conscious, intentional actions** that we “choose,” one can see that there’s a lot at stake in the formation of our automatic unconscious.”

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

#### I. Character Formation

Our character, in a very significant way, is who we are on a non-cognitive level. ***It is who you are on "autopilot".***

**In that split second decision - we reveal what we practiced to truly love most.**



## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

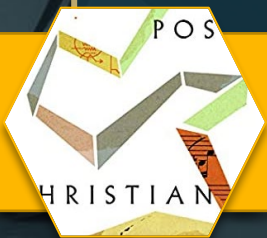
#### I. Character Formation

#### **Our Digital Habits also form us.**

Research has shown that the tweets with the highest engagement are only 100 characters long. The optimum Facebook post was found to be only 40 characters.



“Compare this to the books of print-oriented culture, which can pursue arguments and develop ideas for hundreds of pages. No wonder argumentation on the Internet consists largely of insults, snarky observations, and snappy comebacks. Anything else would require too many characters! **The medium itself prevents sustained thought.**”



**Post-Christian, pg 177**

Gene E. Veith Jr.

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

#### I. Character Formation

A feed of bite-sized unrelated tid-bits instead of books train us to be like people with extreme ADHD - unable to follow a long train of thought...

**We might end up in a self-inflicted Dark Age.**





## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

- I. Character Formation
- II. Secular & Spiritual Disciplines Inventory

If we simply took an inventory of the ratio of secular disciplines to spiritual disciplines that we made practices of - perhaps we would understand why so much of the North American church struggles to resemble a people who 'seek first the Kingdom'.



## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### A. Practices that form us (Liturgies)

- I. Character Formation
- II. Secular & Spiritual Disciplines Inventory

So, how did our culture (and even some churches) become so Post-Christian? **One explanation is that we practiced and disciplined ourselves to be.**



# WHAT CAN WE DO?



- **The personal disciplines** - fasting, prayer, meditation, silence and solitude.

...these train us to be the type of people who respond in virtue automatically by practicing self-denial and dependence on the Lord.

- **The communal disciplines** - hospitality, communal singing of hymns, celebrations, confession, church discipline, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

...shape us into an inter-connected community of citizens of the heavenly kingdom who desire the Day when we will perfectly enjoy what they foreshadow.

- **The sacrificial disciplines** - giving offerings and tithes, service, alms, witness, evangelism and suffering for the sake of Christ.

...form us to be the kind of people who loosen their grip on the trappings of this present age to call others to join us in losing our lives today to find that we will gain them with Christ for eternity.





# Questions for Breakout

(5-10 mins)

- What practices are you regularly immersed in as part of your daily/weekly habits? And if you were honest with yourself, are these positive (forming you into the kind of person who embodies the kingdom of God) or negative?
- How have spiritual disciplines played a part in shaping your vision of the good life? What are some concrete steps you can take to use spiritual disciplines to change your practices and form your character?

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### B. Stories that give meaning (Gospel)

These stories answer four main questions:

- **What were we made for?** (Creation)
- **What went wrong?** (Fall)
- **What can solve it?** (Redemption)
- **What's the hope of "the good life"?** (Consummation)

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### B. Stories that give meaning (Gospel/Doctrine)

#### I. DANGEROUS STORIES | Another "Gospel"







## Dr. David Mackereth (UK)

Statement from the court tribunal:

"**Belief in Genesis 1:27**, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism **in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity** and conflict with the fundamental rights of others, specifically here, transgender individuals."



## Bill C-6 | “Conversion Therapy” (Canada)

From Bill C-6:

“The Bill would discourage and denounce harmful practices and treatments that are based on **myths** and stereotypes about LGBTQ2 people. These include **myths** and stereotypes **that the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ2 people are undesirable and temporary conditions that can and should be changed.**”

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### B. Stories that give meaning (Gospel/Doctrine)

#### I. DANGEROUS STORIES | Another "Gospel"

- **Origins** (Creation) – materialistic naturalism & dualism of body and soul
- **Fall** – people are born with bodies that do not correspond to their authentic self
- **Redemption & the "good life"** – gender transition to become in line with one's authentic self and live happily ever after



"What is arriving is the hope of a new world that is all glitter and rainbows: a good-news story! Online articles, news stories, movies: these all showcase people who, once lost and confused or struggling with identity because of societally imposed standards, have now been freed by being true to who they feel themselves to be. The former Bruce Jenner, an Olympic champion decathlete and epitome of masculinity, is unveiled to the world as Caitlyn, an example of how we can soar above our pain and hurt and become someone new-and all of our own making. **We are being offered a rival gospel:** a narrative that seeks first to expose the Christian gospel as bad news, and then to replace it with much-needed good news."

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### **B. Stories that give meaning (Gospel/Doctrine)**

#### **I. DANGEROUS STORIES** | Another "Gospel"

Some of the Dangers of this 'false gospel':

- Long term health effects & irreversible damage
- Over 80% of teens who struggle with sexual identity resolve it on their own within 6 years
- Suicide rate twenty times higher than peers (Swedish study)
- Double the stroke risk, double risk of heart attack in men and triple in women (Dutch study)
- Silencing of challenges to the narrative (e.g. Ryan T. Anderson on Amazon)

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### **B. Stories** that give meaning (Gospel/Doctrine)

#### **I. DANGEROUS STORIES** | Another "Gospel"

##### **A Hospital for the Hurting**

From some recent polls done, one out of every six young people in iGen identify as LGBTQ.

**This should make us as Christians concerned and compassionate to those who struggle with issues of sexual identity.**





“...our culture has rarely been more hostile towards the gospel, but at the same time it has rarely been more open either... Our time would be better spent preparing for what I believe will be a **tsunami of the broken** and wounded who wash up on our shores.”

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### **B. Stories that give meaning (Gospel/Doctrine)**

**I. DANGEROUS STORIES** | Another "Gospel"

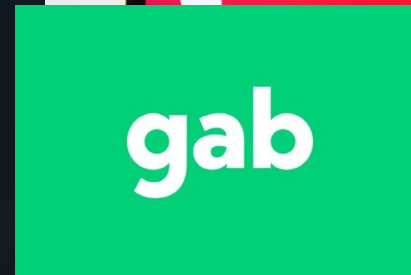
**II. DISTORTED STORIES** | Algorithms & Agendas

The fact is that a handful of companies control the majority of the world's access to information.





FOCUS<sup>®</sup>  
ON THE FAMILY





# 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



## II. DISTORTED STORIES | Algorithms & Agendas

This is not to make a statement about whether or not you agree with the reasons of these Big Tech companies.

It is simply to make you aware and illustrate the immense power these companies wield to direct public thought by controlling what access to truth we have and even over cities and governments due to their economic impact.

**The majority of people don't read their news anymore, we watch it. Images rather than texts tend to invoke more of an emotional and visceral response than a logical response.**



**There simply is no such thing as an uninterpreted fact.**



## **Zeynep Tufekci** (from an article in Politico)

“...the glut of information we now face, made possible by digital tools and social media platforms, can bury what is true, greatly elevate and **amplify misinformation and distract from what is important...**

Crucial pieces of information drown in so much irrelevance that they are lost. If books were burned in the street, we would be alarmed.

**Now, we are simply exhausted.”**



## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE

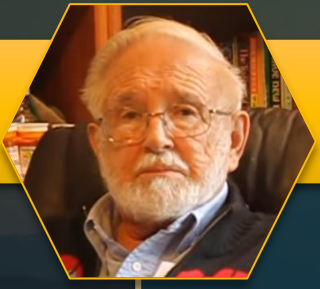


### **B. Stories** that give meaning (Gospel/Doctrine)

I. DANGEROUS STORIES | Another "Gospel"

II. DISTORTED STORIES | Algorithms & Agendas

**Why is all of this important for Christians?**



## **James Sire,** Naming the Elephant, pg 112

“A **plausibility structure** is a web of beliefs that are so embedded in the hearts and minds of the bulk of a society that people hold them either unconsciously or so firmly that they never think to ask if they are true...

One of the main functions of a plausibility structure is to provide the background of beliefs that makes arguments easy or hard to accept.”

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### **Why is all of this important for Christians?**

- Christianity is no longer seen as a valid option.
- The mass of information available can make people feel lost and hopeless in ever finding any objective truth.

*Our current struggle is not so much with what people believe, but what is believable to people.*





# WHAT CAN WE DO?



## I. Wisdom in a Distracted Digital Age

- Firstly, go online with a purpose.



## Brett McCracken

"The antidote to dangerous distractibility in the digital age is purpose, focus, and intention. Proverbs 4:25 says, "Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you." This is wisdom in contrast to the unwise woman of folly, who "does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it" (Prov. 5:6)."



# WHAT CAN WE DO?



## I. Wisdom in a Distracted Digital Age

- **Firstly, go online with a purpose.**
- **Secondly**, we need to remember the effect of these social algorithms and biases in the media. This will cause Christians to **think soberly before reacting** (James 1:19).
- Lastly, **check the facts** before resharing and reacting – Biblical standard = 2 or 3 independent lines of witness.  
(Deut. 17:6 & 19:15; Num. 35:30; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; John 8:17; Heb. 10:28; 1 Tim. 5:19)





# WHAT CAN WE DO?



## I. Wisdom in a Distracted Digital Age

## II. Connecting the Gospel's Story to Culture

- Our culture's story reflect the deep longing in all of us for something more to life... they 'echo' the Gospel's story.
- Tell a better story.

“Are we always consuming culture and never creating it? Why aren't we telling better stories with all the same realism, imagination, subtlety, complexity and beauty, but without those aspects which make it difficult and unhelpful for us? Why aren't we strategically locating, discipling, resourcing and sending out Christians gifted in the arts and the media?”

Daniel Strange



PLUGGED  
IN



**Plugged In, pg 88**  
Daniel Strange



# WHAT CAN WE DO?



- Tell a better story...

The Gospel message of the Cross will both **CONFRONT** and **CONNECT** with our culture at various points.

**What does this look like?**







# WHAT CAN WE DO?



## What does this look like? (Acts 17)

- **ENTER** - Step in and listen to the story.  
"I passed along and observed the objects of your worship" (v23)
- **EXPLORE** - Search for elements of grace and the idols attached to them.  
"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious... I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.'" (v.22-23)
- **EXPOSE** - Show up the idols as destructive frauds.  
"Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man." (v29)
- **EVANGELIZE** - Show how the Gospel is the fulfilment they were really looking for...  
"What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." (v23)



# Questions for Breakout

(5-10 mins)

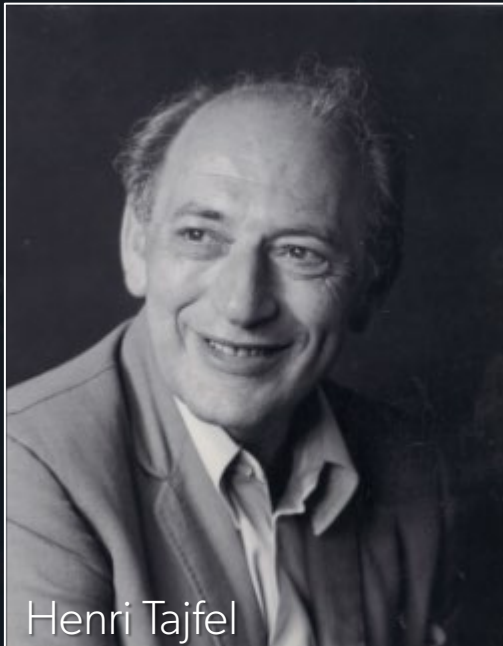
- What are some ways you've observed that the stories our cultures tell make it more difficult for people to receive the Gospel?
- What are some fruitful ways you've found to connect the Gospel's true story to the longings that our culture's stories express?

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE

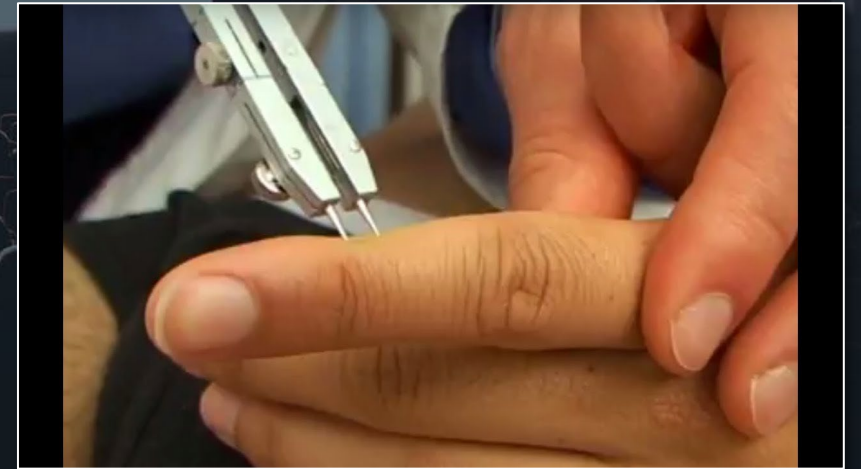


### C. **Groups** that define us (Community)

#### I. SINFUL TRIBALISM



Henri Tajfel





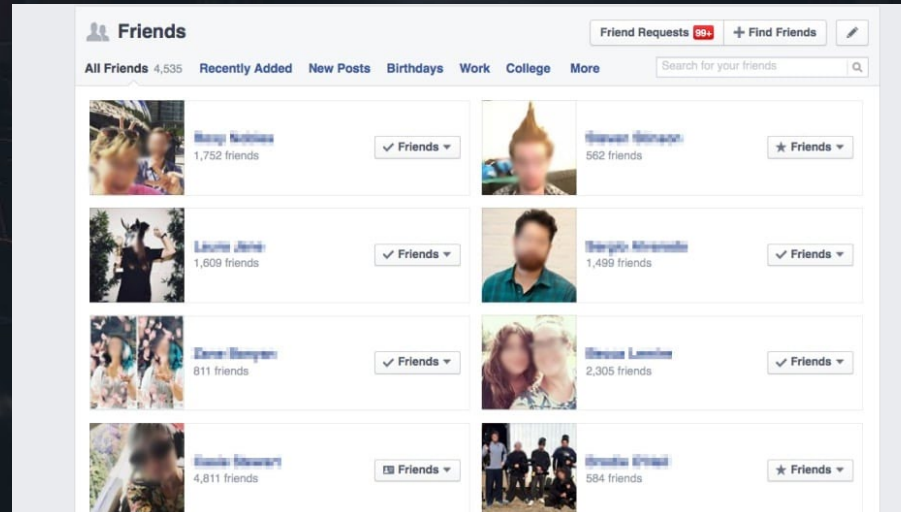
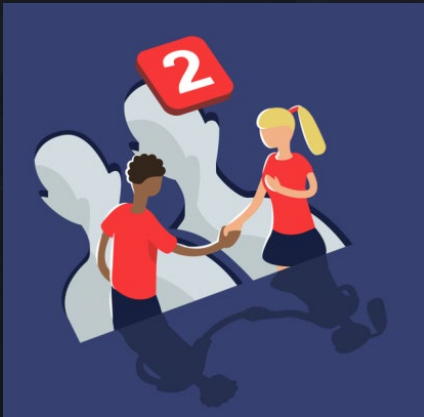
# 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



## C. Groups that define us (Community)

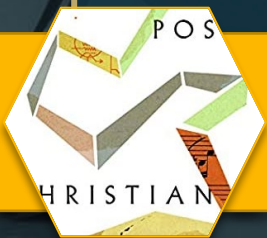
### I. SINFUL TRIBALISM

There is a certain disassociation that happens when our only interaction with someone is mediated by a screen - they become just a name and picture instead of an embodied soul.



“Groups that consist solely of individuals who are like each other, as in online communities, will often **define themselves by their opposition to other groups**. This is a formula for social discord...

This context makes it easier to **dehumanize people**—they have no faces, no bodies—and thus to treat them viciously. **You treat them as abstractions, personifications of the ideas or qualities you hate, rather than as tangible “neighbors” whom the Bible enjoins us to love.**”



**Post-Christian, pgs 174-175**

Gene Veith Jr

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



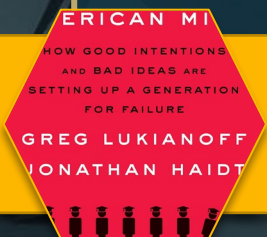
### C. **Groups** that define us (Community)

- I. SINFUL TRIBALISM
- II. "US" VERSUS "THEM"



"The combination of common-enemy identity politics and microaggression training creates an environment highly conducive to the development of a "**call-out culture**," in which students gain prestige for identifying small offenses committed by members of their community, and then publicly "calling out" the offenders...

Life in a call-out culture requires constant vigilance, fear, and self censorship. **Many in the audience may feel sympathy for the person being shamed but are afraid to speak up, yielding the false impression that the audience is unanimous in its condemnation."**



## **The Coddling of the American Mind, pgs 71-72**

**Jonathan Haidt & Greg Lukianoff**



**Trent Eady** (Canadian LGBTQ activist)

"Thinking this way quickly divides the world into an ingroup and an outgroup-believers and heathens, the righteous and the wrong-teous... **Every minor heresy inches you further away from the group.** When I was part of groups like this, **everyone was on exactly the same page about a suspiciously large range of issues. Internal disagreement was rare.**"

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CULTURE



### C. **Groups** that define us (Community)

I. SINFUL TRIBALISM

II. "US" VERSUS "THEM"

This is also why every issue today seems to become politicized. If everything is about power struggles and being in the right group or crowd, we can understand the appeal to look for salvation in political solutions.





# WHAT CAN WE DO?



## Counter-Cultural Community & Biblical Unity

The Bible gives us a powerful counter-culture to our culture's hyper-individualism and tribalism of Us versus Them. It is found in the authentic expression of Biblical community.

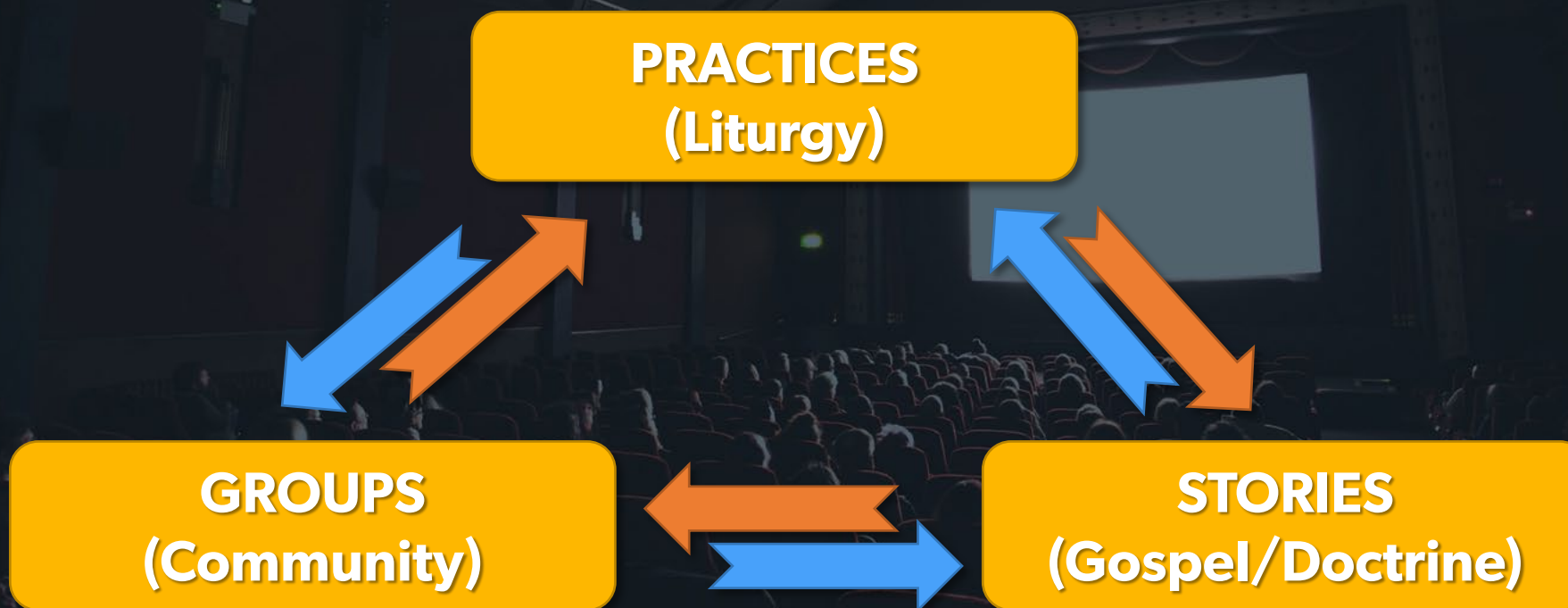
Our culture wants to define us by its groups - however, we are already defined by our membership in a group: the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. That should be the primary group we find identity in.

# 3. WHAT NOW?



## A. Vicious or Virtuous Feedback Loops

# Vicious Or Virtuous Feedback Loop?



You can either be a victim of how our culture teaches us to use these things, or you can utilize how the Bible tells us to use these things to shape you and the culture you create to His Kingdom.



# 3. WHAT NOW?



- A. Vicious or Virtuous Feedback Loops**
- B. Withdrawal is not an option**



## Robert Letham (Systematic Theology, 593)

“We are in a war. There is an enemy. That enemy is no gentleman, prepared to play by the rules and on a level playing field. **When the world around us is relinquished to a supposedly neutral ‘common kingdom,’ that enemy will seize control, and in many ways has done so and is increasingly advancing.**”

# 3. WHAT NOW?



**A. Vicious or Virtuous Feedback Loops**

**B. Withdrawal is not an option**

**C. Faithful Presence**

- IN, Not OF, but FOR Culture



## Jeremiah 29:5-7

"**Build** houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; **multiply** there, and do not decrease... **seek the welfare of the city** where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, **for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**"

# 3. WHAT NOW?



- A. Vicious or Virtuous Feedback Loops**
- B. Withdrawal is not an option**
- C. Faithful Presence**
- D. Courage & Realistic Expectations**



Ernest Shackleton

*"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success."*



# 3. WHAT NOW?



- A. Vicious or Virtuous Feedback Loops**
- B. Withdrawal is not an option**
- C. Faithful Presence**
- D. Courage & Realistic Expectations**



# Hebrews 12:1-3

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also **lay aside every weight**, and sin which clings so closely, and let us **run with endurance** the race that is set before us, **looking to Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

# SUMMARY



## 1. Culture is not inherently evil

- Take up the Creation Mandate

## 2. Culture is inherently religious

- Practices (Liturgies)
- Stories (Gospel)
- Groups (Community)

## 3. Faithful Presence & Courage

- In, not of, but for culture

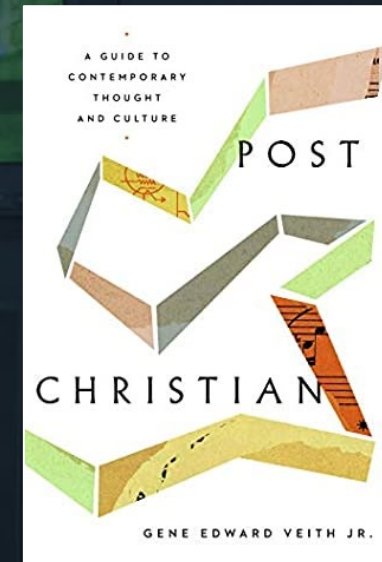
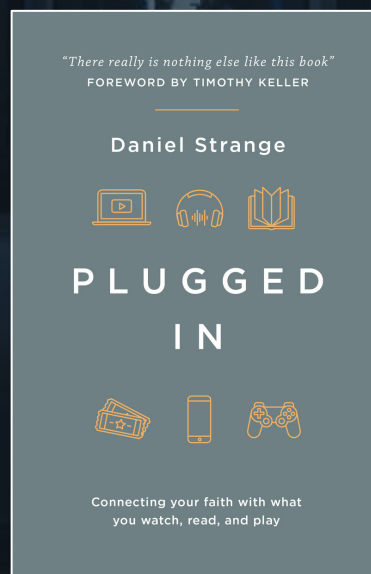
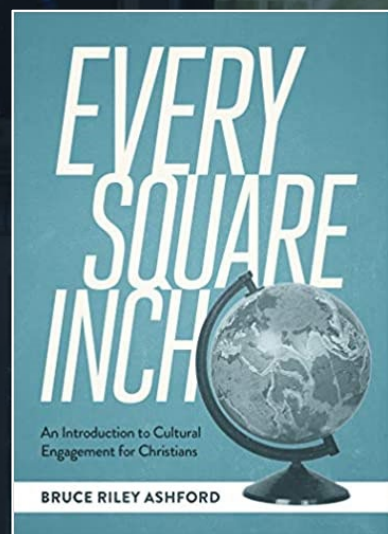
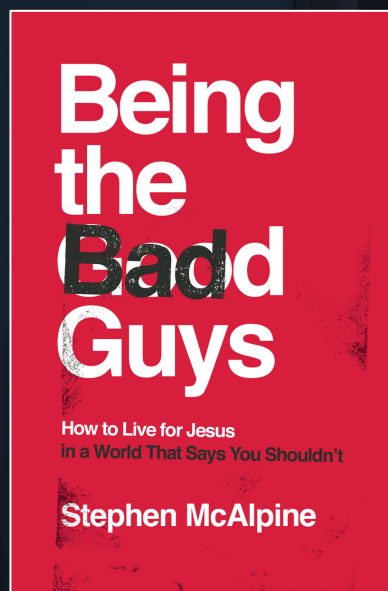




**Let's Pray**



# Recommended Resources





# Q&A

