

Study Guide for "Everything Must Change"
Last Revision: 1/18/10

Hello Friends:

I personally have found *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope (EMC)* to be one of the more profound books I have ever read—so much so I read it a few times! In short, I think Brian is dead-on in his assessment of the problems our world faces and what the “true” message of Jesus might offer to help us address them.

This document contains an “unofficial” Study Guide for *EMC* that I originally created for use in a men’s group I participate in. *EMC* has had a profound influence on me, and I wanted to create a way to make this information more *accessible* to the guys. Sometimes reading a lengthy book like this can be intimidating; people simply can’t or won’t tackle the reading. (I write these kinds of summaries for a living, so this is something I seem to have a talent for.) The men in my group found these guides helpful and strongly encouraged me to see if they might be shared with a larger audience. I approached Brian about the possibility, and he graciously agreed to post.

A couple of notes on what is here:

- I have outlined the flow of the entire book herein, but as of now, detailed guides are included for **Parts III–VI**. I hope to have the opportunity to post the other section. Watch for possible future updates...
- My copy of *EMC* was an *advanced copy* of the book—I couldn’t wait!—so the page references are probably different than your book. However, you should be able to find your way around.
- Any *opinions* and *explanations* herein (that aren’t quoted from the book) are my own *spin* on what Brian is trying to say, and may and may not represent what he actually intended to say. I hope I’m close. □

I hope that you find these resources helpful as you study *EMC*!

Many Blessings,

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I have known **Brian McLaren** for many years, having attended Cedar Ridge Community Church when he was pastor. I enjoy and appreciate his speaking and writing immensely. He has obviously thought deeply about the state of the Church today... appreciating its past and offering a realistic and hopeful vision for its future. I have read most if not all of his books.

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- *The Human Situation*: What is the story we find ourselves in?
- *Basic Questions*: What questions did Jesus come to answer?
- *Jesus' Message*: How did Jesus respond to the crisis?
- *Purpose of Jesus*: Why is Jesus Important?

The Conventional View's Unintended Negative Consequences (pp. 82-85) discusses six "suicidal tendencies" of the *conventional view* and contrasts with the *emerging view*. The table below summarizes the information in this section.

Issue	Conventional View	Emerging View
<i>Jesus is the...</i>	Answer to a legal problem called <i>original sin</i> .	Cure to a sickness that plagues humanity— <i>sin</i> .
<i>God's primary focus is on...</i>	Saving individuals from the world's eventual destruction.	Saving the world by transforming it to match with God's dream.
<i>God's concern is ...</i>	For "spiritual" matters over secular ones.	For both spiritual and secular matters.
<i>God's blessings are for...</i>	An elect group of chosen people.	All humanity and all of creation.
<i>The world...</i>	Will get worse and worse until God destroys it.	Will get better and better as God's followers work to transform it.

*I believe we need to face the real possibility that the **conventional view** has in many ways been domesticated, watered down, and co-opted by the dominant framing story of our modern Western culture, and as a result has become "a Gospel about Jesus" but not "the gospel of Jesus" — EMC, p. 85*

*How ironic that the **cross** —the icon of the dominating Roman framing story— became the icon for the liberating framing story of Jesus. And **how much more ironic** if we who believe in Jesus don't get the irony. — EMC, p. 88*

Jesus Resituated (pp. 85-88) in the context of the world in which he actually lived—the Roman Empire—helps us to get proper context for understanding what Jesus taught—we might call it *emerging context* to understand Jesus "correctly."

QUESTIONS (pp. 88-89)

Chapter 11: Switching Jigsaw Lids (pp. 90-96)

The Counternarratives of Jesus' Day (pp. 91-93) discusses the *framing story* that the Jewish people of Jesus' day lived by. They refused live by the *narrative* (or story) that the Empire told—*pax Romana*. There were a variety of *counternarratives* that they came up with to explain both *why they were subjugated by the Romans*, and *what they could do to change the situation*—e.g., Zealots, Pharisees, Herodians (Saducees), and Essenes.

The Emerging View of Jesus (pp. 93-95) talks about how Jesus came an introduced a new story that was an alternative that was different from all the others. Brian's thesis is that we have to understand this new story to truly understand Jesus...

QUESTIONS (pp. 95-96)

NOTE: In **Chapter 12** Brian speaks more generally about how the scriptures come alive in new ways in the *emerging context* of Jesus that we have been discussing. Then he turns to a few more specific examples in **Chapter 13 and 14**.

Chapter 12: No Junk DNA (pp. 97-104)

Twelve Features of Jesus' Ministry That Are Not Junk (pp. 98-104) talks about how once we start understanding the *emerging view* of Jesus, we start to realize that there is "no junk" in the Gospels. Whereas before large chunks of scriptures might have been dismissed as not being important under the *conventional view*, now almost every word is alive with new meaning! Brian talks about topics like how in the Gospels, Jesus:

- Demonstrates a totally new way of living and refuses to conform to any existing narrative or counternarrative (e.g., conflict with religious leaders, association with people on the margin, etc.) and welcomes people from all walks of life to follow him.
- Emphasizes that we can't live by more than one story (e.g., Nicodemus, Rich young ruler, hypocrites) and that if we follow Him, we must completely part company with the other stories.
- Tells parables about stewards (e.g., the unjust steward) that have much more meaning in the context of the *emerging view* as stewards tried to "straddle the fence" in Jesus' day.
- Intentionally uses titles (e.g., Christ, Son of Man, Lord) that would have been extremely controversial to his original audience and set him directly at odds with the powers that be.
- Drives out demons (both personal and corporate) in God's name that become signs and wonders that show that God—not Caesar—is the true Power in the Universe.
- Repeatedly speaks of the *kingdom of God* as a present reality, which would again be positively revolutionary in the context of the Roman Empire in which he lived.

QUESTIONS (p. 104)

Chapter 13: Jamming the Accelerator, Slamming the Breaks (pp. 105-112)

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Songs of Mary and Zechariah (pp. 105-109) talks about how these passages of scripture recorded in **Luke 1** take on entirely new meaning in the emerging context we're discussing as opposed to how these verses usually get interpreted.

Notice the discussion about the terms *redeem* and *salvation* especially on pp. 108-109 and how these terms take different meaning in the *emerging context*. I think this is an extremely important point Brian makes.

Not a Tame Prophet (pp. 109-112) talks about how Jesus' declaration in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry (recorded in **Luke 4**) also becomes a much more explosive declaration when interpreted in the *emerging context*—in modern terms, the original audience would have been fairly shocked leaving "church" that day that the guest speaker said what he said!

QUESTIONS (p. 112)

Chapter 14: Or So It Appeared (pp. 113-119)

Peter's Declaration at Caesarea-Philippi (pp.113-116) discusses the conversation that Peter had with Jesus just before the Transfiguration (recorded in **Matthew 16**) and how the *emerging context* really brings out details of this conversation that might have been dismissed as "extra" in previous readings. Peter is still struggling to understand what it really means for Jesus to be the *messiah*.

Jesus Stands Before Pilate (pp. 117-119) talks about how the *emerging context* really heightens the significance of the conversation Jesus has with Pilate prior to his crucifixion recorded in **John 18**.

QUESTIONS (p. 112)

Part IV: Reintroducing Jesus
(Chapters 15–18)

Brian makes an attempt in this section to say, okay now that we have "reframed" Jesus in his original context, perhaps we can now "reintroduce" him and start thinking about how his message "speaks" to the problems that our world faces today.

Chapter 15: Peace Through Domination (pp. 123-131)

- Brian points out that others (e.g., fundamentalists) try and "reintroduce" Jesus to the issues our modern world faces as well, but they don't usually think about "reframing" him before they "reintroduce" him, and that is where they, in his opinion, run into trouble. (pp. 123-124)

To read the Gospels in the spirit in which they were written, it is not enough to ask what Jesus *did* or *said*. We must ask what Jesus *meant* by his strange words and deeds. —From *What Jesus Meant*, by Garry Wills [Quoted in EMC, p. 124.]

- Brian suggests its possible to *misquote* Jesus even when we quote his words directly.
- He shares an example of the arguments people give against helping the poor and backing it up with scripture: "*The poor you will always have with you.*" [Matthew 26:11] He points out how ridiculous this argument ends up sounding when you study the *original context* for this quote [See **Deuteronomy 15.**] (pp. 124-125)
- We can sometimes turn *exegesis* (interpreting scripture) into a theological football game... or wrestling match. Whoever can back up their point of view with more scriptures "wins" the argument. (p. 125)
- So our question becomes: *What did Jesus mean?* In other words, how would his **original audience** have understood his words? Once you do that, you start to find *resonance* with our own life and times.

But what can ancient stories provide us with today? Clearly, we cannot somehow simply "apply" them to today's situation—nor should we. Nonetheless these peace-building stories—indeed, all of Scripture—contain a **clear direction**, a grain as unmistakable as the wood grain of oak or cherry. —From *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises* [Quoted in EMC, p. 126.]

The Good News of Jesus (pp. 126-128) looks at context for the term "good news"—it is a distinctly **political** term. The Roman Empire considered the *story* that they told to be "good news" for its citizens. To them, Caesar Augustus was *savior* and *liberating king*. So when Jesus comes sharing a new kind of "good news" and claiming to be the *Messiah* he is directly challenging Caesar's authority. Consider also how both *stories* use the symbol of the *cross* but in very different ways:

The Roman Empire uses a *cross* to punish rebels and **instill fear and submission** in the oppressed; Jesus will use a *cross* to expose the cruelty and

injustice of those in power and instill hope and confidence in the oppressed.
— EMC, p. 128.

Hearing Jesus with First Century Ears (pp. 128-131) is a discussion of how we need to "reclaim" Jesus' words and phrases from modern interpretations that may miss the mark. As we've seen, Jesus often uses terminology that was already prevalent in the time and place he lived. Jesus also uses a *variety of images*—e.g., Kingdom Imagery, Family Imagery, Ecological Imagery—that would have connected to his original audience. (pp. 129-130) A couple of examples:

- "Repent and believe in me" would not have been an invitation to give up sinning and have a religious experience but rather to "turn" from their own agenda to follow Jesus' agenda. (Josephus used the same language.) (pp. 128-129)
- "Kingdom of God" would also be heard very differently than we might hear it today. It was a radical invitation to a whole new way of living in the world of Jesus' day and a challenge to the prevailing authority. (p.129)

QUESTIONS (p. 131)

Chapter 16: Occupying Regime, Equity Gap, Excrement Factory (pp.132-137)

The metaphor of *kingdom of God* for conveying Jesus' new *framing story* might not be as useful for us today as it would have been for Jesus' original audience, so Brian suggests some creative alternatives Jesus might use today. You will notice he has one for each of the three "cogs" of the *suicide machine* (security, equity, and prosperity) and a fourth over-arching metaphor. The metaphors should help us envision an alternative way forward from the dominant framing story that so permeates our culture.

- **Divine Peace Insurgency** (pp. 132-133) is the metaphor for envisioning how we might repair or restore balance to the *security system*. We can think of ourselves as an *insurgency* that works to "bring down" the *occupying regime* or, put in language we've been using, change the *prevailing framing story*.
- **God's Un-Terror Movement** (pp. 133-134) is the metaphor for envisioning how we might repair or restore balance to the *equity system*. Again, we view ourselves as cells of people seeking to change the *prevailing story*. Terrorists plot destruction, but we who follow Jesus *plot goodness* in the world and help bring about the hopeful future God dreams of.
- **New Global Love Economy** (pp. 134-135) is the metaphor for envisioning how we might repair or restore balance to the *prosperity system*. We replace our insatiable consumer-driven economy that has no regard for *creaturely limitations* (see discussion in **Chapter 17**) with a *love-based economy* whose top priority is deepening relationships with God and one another—in this new economy, *gross national product* is not nearly as important as "*gross national affection*".
- **God's Sacred Ecosystem** (pp. 135-136) is an *overarching metaphor* to encompass Jesus' alternative *framing story* (akin to the use of *kingdom of God* in the Bible) whose goal is to see God's original dream for creation come

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true. We are given the opportunity to be *co-creators* with God and we can either work for or against the dream.

- **The Real Culture War** (pp. 136-137) is the struggle between empire and earth communities and the outcome depends on the *prevailing stories* that shape our understanding. **David Korten** suggests that the New Right was not representative of a majority of Christians, but was able gain power and influence because they managed to *control the stories* (e.g., through their control of the media) that answered three basic questions:

- **The Prosperity Story:** How do we prosper?
- **The Security Story:** How do we maintain order and keep ourselves secure?
- **The Meaning Story:** How do we find a sense of meaning and purpose in life?

QUESTIONS (p. 137)

Chapter 17: How Different It Would Be? (pp. 138-144)

Having developed the metaphor of *sacred ecosystem* in the previous chapter, Brian now begins to construct a new framing story that offers hope for more effectively responding to the problems our world faces today. Placing this *new story* at the center of our *societal machine* starts to transform the prosperity, equity, and security systems we've been discussing. He uses **Matthew 6** as text.

- At the heart of the old (imperial) framing story is *insecurity* and *fear*—*enough is never enough* so store up all you can get so you are *safe*; at the heart of the new (Jesus) framing story is *generosity* and *hope*—true "riches" come when we give *everything*—even our very life—away [**Matthew 6:19-23.**]
- Jesus exposes the *dual narrative* that some try and live by—e.g., tax collectors and stewards, religious scholars, wealthy, etc. He challenges the notion that I can "*be a Jew (or in our modern context, a Christian) in my heart*" but continue to live unchanged (as part of the *dominant story*) on the outside [**Matthew 6:24.**]
- Jesus uses two illustrations from the natural world to describe his alternative framing story [**Matthew 6:25-30.**] The *birds of the air* and the *flowers of the field* emphasize: (1) God values the birds and the flowers (i.e., God cares about creation); and (2) *how much more* God values human beings.
- The conclusion of this passage makes it clear that Jesus is challenging the prevailing (Roman) story when he talks about, "*pagans running after all these things.*" *Pagans* would refer not to irreligious people but to any Gentiles □ it would include all members of the Roman Empire [**Matthew 6:28-31**] whose *framing story* drives them to an insatiable desire to hoard material possessions in hopes that this will make them prosperous and safe.

After discussing how *Jesus' story* challenges the *prevailing story* of his day, Brian now turns to how *Jesus' story* challenges the *prevailing stories* of our modern world.

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- Like the Roman framing story, our *modern industrial framing* story also places distance between humans and the rest of creation—we can thank the Enlightenment for this. Creation is often seen as ours to do with as we please—*raw materials* to fuel the *societal machine* of progress, colonization, conquest, etc.
- The *dualistic* view (i.e., humanity placed over nature) permeates our theology. *Soul* is placed “above” the *body* and we focus on where the disembodied *soul* will go after death. A creature’s value is thus defined in terms of how useful it is to human beings. But the problem is that if the rest of creation is reduced to **zero** value, then even if humans are a million times more valuable than the rest of creation, they still have **zero** value—because **zero** times anything is still **zero**.
- This division between human beings and the rest of creation doesn’t make much sense but the idea is deeply rooted in our *modern Western story*.
- It is not however, a part of *Jesus’ alternative story*. In that story, **God actually cares for every living creature regardless of how valuable that creature is to human beings.**
- *God’s sacred ecosystem* thus not only provides *care* for every creature’s needs but also sets *limits* on every creature—including humans. Brian uses the story of the temptation of Jesus [**Luke 4:1-13**] as an example of how even Jesus lived within limits and refused to exceed them even if he could.
- The Roman and modern framing stories do not respect such *creaturely limits* but Jesus calls us to **defect** from those old stories and live by a new one.
- In this light, **repentance** means turning away from the old story you have lived by in order to embrace a new one—not just turning away from sin.

Sadly, because we [individually and corporately] are so fully indoctrinated by the imperial framing story of our day, few of us can imagine **how different it would be** to live in the framing story of Jesus. —*EMC*, p. 143

QUESTIONS (p. 144)

Chapter 18: Which Jesus? (pp. 145-151)

The chapter opens with a quote from **Wendell Berry** (pp. 145-146) that talks about how deeply rooted *institutional churches* are in the very framing story they are supposed to oppose! Brian then talks about how, once we separate our bodies from our souls, it becomes easier to ignore creaturely limits. We get caught up in self-preservation (whether individual or corporate) and forget about the people and planet impacted by our choices. Wendell Berry says that “*true religion*” helps to reconnect us to care and concern about the world around us, and proper love and respect for creation—this type of religion Brian describes as “*the only sane alternative to the economies and narratives that drive the world today*” (p. 146.)

Please ask yourself: What if Jesus isn’t being cute and romantic in the Sermon on the Mount? What if he is being completely serious and means to be taken seriously? What if he is proposing the **ultimate deconstruction**—the deconstruction of all human structures, whether scientific pre-analytic visions, governments, economies, ideologies, civilizations, and the framing stories that drive them—so that we can be **recomposed** in our true identity, resituated in *God’s primal framing story* of creation? What if he is trying to excavate

through layer upon layer of carpeting, plywood, ceramic tile, blacktop, gravel, trash, broken glass, and cement, so our bare feet can once again feel the cool, moist, soft soil from which we were, and are, all created. —EMC, pp. 146-147

Which Jesus Are We Talking About? (pp. 147-149) examines the idea that there are a number of different "versions" of Jesus running around in our world today. Brian has been trying to paint a picture of the Jesus portrayed in the canonical Gospels, but some views are diametrically oppose this *Gospel view*...

Second Coming Jesus. This version of Jesus conveys the idea that the *humble Jesus* of the First Coming was like a "secret identity", and the "real" *jihadist Jesus* stays hidden until the Second Coming—like humble Clark Kent was hiding *Superman*. In this view, Jesus is often portrayed as a *Christian action hero* who races in wearing a white robe to fight the Enemy in black like an old Western. Ultimately, in this view, **peace can be obtained only through redemptive violence**. Jesus may have been meek and mild the first time but he won't make that "mistake" again—*this time he's coming back to kick some serious ass!* When he returns, he will destroy the Enemy in a final ultimate battle and those not on "his side" will be punished eternally in hell.

- Brian suggests that this view of *jihadist Jesus* arises when we badly misinterpret the meaning and interpretation of Revelation—cites **Revelation 19:15** as humorous example.
- The meaning is very different if we understand the context of Revelation correctly and assume that the First Coming was in fact the *climactic revelation of God* as scriptures attest [**Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:1-4.**]
- Brian thus suggests that **any Second Coming is likely to be similar to the First Coming**—very good insight here for us to think about.

The Jesus of Love and Grace (pp. 149-151) suggests a better way to interpret the book of Revelation including a quote from **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, given just days before he was assassinated—kind of ironic. Brian also contrasts the two views of Jesus we've been considering and the conclusions to which they lead us.

The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems. —**Mohandas Gandhi** [Quoted in EMC, p. 150.]

QUESTIONS (p. 151)

Part V: The Security System
(Chapters 19–22)

Chapter 19: Joining the Peace Insurgency (pp. 155-164)

Brian now turns to looking at the three parts of the societal machine (security, prosperity, and equity) and how the new understanding of the message of Jesus might help us rethink these *primary systems* on which our society is built. He starts with the *security system* in Part V...

Religion: Armed and Dangerous (pp. 156-158) Unfortunately, sometimes religion seems to baptize or legitimize violence. Brian mentions **Sam Harris**, an atheist who has written a couple popular books lately, in which he claims that religion "*aids and abets the violent turn in society.*" Harris suggests that religion motivates terrorist to fly planes into building... and it also motivates violent responses to terrorist attacks—such as wars in foreign countries. He also says that all religion—i.e., not just the extremists—are responsible because moderates "provide cover" for the more extreme actions of people on the so-called fringe.

We have a society where 44% of the people claim to be either certain or confident that Jesus is going to come back out the clouds and judge the living and the dead sometime in the next 50 years. It just seems transparently obvious that this belief will do nothing to create a durable civilization... —**Sam Harris** [Quoted in *EMC*, p. 156.]

Brian says that Harris' views begin to sound very much like those of philosophers during the Enlightenment (p. 156)—compare the quotes on p. 157, one from Harris and the other from Thomas Payne (1795). Some of this gets back to the question raised in **Chapter 18**—*which Jesus are we talking about?* In Both Harris and McLaren seem to agree that the answer we decide upon is very important for the future of our society—i.e., if almost half the American people think the end is coming in 50 years, as implied by the quote above, then they aren't likely to be particularly concerned about making the world a "better place".

Brian says that he doesn't blame Harris for portraying Jesus as "moody" (p. 158) because that's exactly how the religion that bears his name has portrayed him to the world over the centuries. We Christians act *bipolar*—i.e., for every peaceful saint there are as many or more war-mongering theologians.

A Radical Reassessment of Jesus (pp. 158-163) Brian suggests the *fresh vision* of Jesus we've been constructing in this book can help us counter Harris' claim a "bipolar" Jesus. Many of the stories of Jesus can be seen differently through the *lens* of this new vision—i.e., we get a "more complete" picture of Jesus. Brian cites **Matthew 15:21-28** as a prime example—Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite Woman.

Couple of Key Points to Keep in Mind (pp. 159-60)

- Matthew is Jewish and wrote to a primarily Jewish audience, but yet he very intentionally includes Gentiles in the story at points, including this excursion by Jesus and his disciples into "Canaanite" territory.

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- Matthew's intent is to *deconstruct* the old narrative and demonstrate how radically different the *Jesus Way* is so he purposefully uses an archaic term like *Canaanite* to evoke memories of Israel's military conquest of Canaan among his Jewish readers. (Mark by contrast doesn't use this term —**Mark 7:26.**)

Commentary on the Passage (pp. 160-62)

- To the woman's request Jesus' initial response is, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.*"—**Matthew 15:24.** That sounds harsh?! Is Jesus being racist here?
- Some suggest that Jesus was merely playing with the woman, and intended to help her all along, but wanted test her faith, etc., but would Jesus really do this to a distraught mother?
- Maybe a better interpretation is something like, "*Listen lady, I would love to help you, but I have my hands full just trying to help the people of Israel... and keep this bumbling band of followers focused...*" (p. 160)
- But Jesus seems to be *converted* or convinced to help by the woman's clever reply. "*Okay, but aren't you people supposed to bring blessing to all people? If so, then it might be good if you helped me out.*" (pp. 160-61)
- Jesus the Jew is "conquered" by this Canaanite, not in a violent military battle, but in the sense that he has a change of heart it seems, and relents and responds to her request for mercy...
- This encounter makes Jesus realize "*it's time to go multicultural*" with his ministry... and he does so in a big way in subsequent stories in Matthew—e.g., the feeding of the 4000—**Matthew 15:32-39.**
- The *seven loaves* that were left over after Jesus fed the 4000 are connected to the seven nations marked for destruction in **Deuteronomy 7:1-5.** Fascinating! (pp. 161-62)
- Jesus unleashes a whole new kind of *conquest* not to destroy others but to serve them, not a *war* waged with weapons but with loaves and fishes.

Jesus seizes the old narrative, shakes it, turns it inside out, and offers a new story that reframes a future radically different from the past. — EMC, p. 162

The Cross—The Greatest Reversal of them All (pp. 162-163)

Jesus' cross is the most dramatic narrative reversal in all of Scripture. Rome used the cross to punish criminals and impose fear of terrible retribution on those who dared oppose the Empire. (*Shock and awe.*) Jesus, on the other hand, used the cross to expose Roman violence and religious complicity with it and give oppressed people hope. (*Reverence and awe.*)

- In Rome's narrative, peace is obtained through domination; for Jesus the motto is... *peace through grace and embrace.* (p. 163)
- The Beatitudes [**Matthew 5:1-11**] stand in contrast to Rome's story and show who is truly blessed in God's narrative—they are much more than mere greeting card sentiments. (p. 163)

[Viewed in this context...] *To repent, to believe, to follow... together, these mean nothing less than defecting from Caesar's campaign of violence to join Jesus' divine peace insurgency.* — EMC, p. 163

QUESTIONS (p. 164)

Chapter 20: Whose Side Are We On? (pp. 165-173)

Despite our claims to be a Christian nation, the U.S. finds itself immersed in a framing story of *redemptive violence*. We fall for the lie that peace will only be possible if we defeat (and eliminate) our enemies. There are some pretty staggering (and sobering IMHO) statistics in this section (and this chapter) about how much the U.S. (and the World) spends on defense. And also in this section, we read about how both the U.S. and Soviet Union kept stockpiling nuclear weapons during the Cold War (with combined power a million times greater than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima) working off a policy of Mutually Assured Destruction—MAD certainly seems a fitting acronym.

The High Cost of Strategic Sufficiency (pp.166-168) Apparently *Mutually Assured Destruction* didn't satisfy folks, so both sides took it a step further and moved toward what they called Strategic Sufficiency. (Henry Kissinger's quote on p. 166 is downright disturbing!) Now the U.S. could boast that it had the power to destroy not one, but **ten** planet Earths.

But It's All Better Now... Right? (pp.166-167)

Well not really... Since the end of the Cold War we've perhaps stepped back a bit from the brink of insanity, but we still spend \$100 million per day to keep weapons primed and ready should we need to use them. George W. Bush received flack for his *preemptive war* doctrine enacted after the 9/11 attacks, but this has really been our standing policy for decades—if not centuries. In 2003, the U.S. military budget was larger than the next 15 nations combined; by 2006—not including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—it was larger than the next twenty-five nations combined.

The "Brain Drain" (pp.167-168)

Brian points out that beyond the staggering price-tag for all this so-called "security," there is an even greater "cost" that it is harder to quantify—the

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collective *brain drain*. What he means by that is that so many of our best minds have been drawn away to work on developing weapons, when they could have been working on applications with much more benefit to society—e.g., renewable energy. As the quote on pp. 167-168 points out: *Violence has become our nation's leading industry*. The bottom line is our best and brightest are drawn to the defense industry because it tends to pay better than other areas—e.g., atmospheric science at NASA. □

We have 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population, Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. — Source quoted in *EMC*, p. 168

In summary then, the purpose of our *security* system seems to be to maintain the inequity of U.S. *prosperity* relative to the rest of the world—or to expand the American Empire.

Are you getting the picture here? The three “cogs” of the machine are all interconnected. In order to maintain our disproportionate *prosperity* in the West, we must pump more and more into *security*. Things are out of whack—you might even say they are *suicidal*...

The American Empire (pp.168-171) presents a couple of different ways of defining Empire that are worth looking at (pp. 168-69) **The bottom line is that no matter how you define it the U.S. increasingly functions like an Empire.** The priorities of that drive our National Security Strategy (p. 169) line up nicely with the definitions given. Sadly, the summary statement: *dominate, intimidate, and refuse to play by the rules that you expect everyone else to follow* fits the U.S. pretty well.

Brian spends the rest of this section debunking **two** prevailing “myths” or “stories” that Americans on the whole believe to be true, and that they think justify our stupendous rate of military spending (ostensibly for our *security* or *defense*)...

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The U.S. is the Most Generous Nation on the Planet (pp.169-170)

Truth be told, we probably ought to dispense with that myth. It just doesn't seem to hold up to the facts... Just in terms of sheer numbers, Japan actually gives more than we do. Beyond that, when our military budget is 21 times larger than our combined budget for diplomacy and foreign aid, the argument loses steam. In fact, we're dead last among developed nations in terms of the percentage of our gross domestic product that goes toward foreign aid. I personally cringe when I read that if just 10% of our military budget was directed toward foreign aid and development, we could care for the needs of all the world's poor, or that 0.5% of the military budget could cut hunger in Africa in half by 2015. (And I feel compelled to add this: If we Americans were so darn generous, then wouldn't we be supporting our churches better than we are—we give on average a pretty pathetic 1–2% of our income.)

Our Military Policy is All in Response to the 9/11 Attacks (pp. 170-171)

Once again a review of the facts suggests this just aint so... While it the concept of *shock and awe*—"winning" by overwhelming our enemies—was the idea behind our response to the 9/11 attacks, the policy really goes back to 1996 (see quote on p. 170.) The precaution Brian gives is that the concept of *shock and awe* sounds eerily similar to *terrorism*, and so it can be argued that our "war on terror" is actually a "war of terror" and so what we really have is two competing types of *terrorism*. (We might argue this, but it is certainly thought provoking!)

Brian points out that the basic concept behind *shock and awe* really goes back much further than 1996. The quote above mentions **Carl von Clausewitz**, a Prussian general who first articulated *total war doctrine*, where war is simply seen as a way of "communicating"—more forceful "communication" perhaps, but as valid as diplomacy, speech writing, etc.

What Happens When We Accept Total War Doctrine (pp. 171-172) looks at what happens when a country such as the U.S., with such destructive capability that we can destroy the planet many times over, adopts what amounts to a *total war doctrine*? We been led to believe that we're spending all this money on defense to maintain peace—i.e., we're trying to assure that we are so powerful militarily that no one would dare attack us. (This sounds kind of like the Roman Empire in Jesus' day doesn't it?) But is it really true? As 9/11 reminded us, no matter how much we spend on "defense," people can and do attack us...

It happens that defense is a field in which I have had varied experience over a lifetime, and if I have learned anything, it is that there is *no* way in which a country can satisfy the **craving for absolute security**—but it can easily bankrupt itself, morally and economically, in attempting to reach that illusory goal through arms alone. —**Dwight D. Eisenhower** [Quoted in *EMC*, p. 172.]

Brian suggests that our country's **craving for absolute security** has already cost us much in terms of our reputation around the world—i.e., we're well on our way to the *moral bankruptcy* Eisenhower speaks of. This might make us feel depressed, like there's no hope for the future, but I like Brian's hopeful words to close the chapter...

But despair is boring and uncreative, and to succumb to it is to empower it. So I turn from it and turn to Jesus, to believe his narrative and join his *peace insurgency*, to stop figuring out how to get him on our side, and instead try to cross over to his side. —EMC, p. 172.

QUESTIONS (pp. 172-173)

Chapter 21: Layers and Layers More (pp. 174-181)

"You might as well face it, you're addicted to [war]..." This chapter forces us to confront a disturbing question: *Are we in fact addicted to war?* The U.S. spends more and more money every year allegedly for its *security*, but all the while the U.S. seems more and more imperial and aggressive to the rest of the world—we have this *vicious downward spiral* of increasing militarization by the U.S. and mushrooming fear and resentment around the world... that leads to more spending for "defense", etc.

And as we peel back the proverbial onion, we find "layers and layers more" of irrational thinking—or "suicidal" logic. There's a whole discussion (pp. 174-175) of how we convinced ourselves that it would be okay to become a weapons dealer for the rest of the world to help finance the spiraling cost of our own "defense." And now some of those very weapons we sold to other countries are being used against American soldiers! Brilliant!

The Suicidal Logic of the War Business (pp. 175-177) points out that the U.S. is far from alone in the "war business." The five countries on the U.N. Security Council account for 86.7% of all global arms sales—throw in the rest of Europe and the number jumps to 93%! However, the U.S. is the undisputed leader in weapons sales—accounting for 53.4% of the total sales all by itself! Most Americans (including me before reading this book) are completely oblivious to these statistics.

We can't have it both ways. We can't be both the world's leading champion for peace and its leading supplier of arms. —Jimmy Carter [Quoted in EMC, p. 175.]

And it gets worse; the government substantially subsidizes the weapons manufacturing industry, only agriculture receives more, and 80% of the sales go to countries that are known for their failure to uphold human rights such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In 1999, the U.S. supplied weapons to 92% of the conflicts in progress on the planet, and often sold weapons to both sides of a conflict. Between 1998–2001, the U.S., Great Britain, and France received more money from selling weapons to developing countries than they provided to those countries in aid. (Not very *generous*, is it?)

Brian points out that there is a grim logic to McNamara's logic selling arms to finance our own *security*. In some twisted way, this is what you "have to do" if you want to be a major player in the *war business*. On the other hand, if you take seriously the concept of following the teachings of Jesus, then I think these kinds of statistics should make you thoughtful. **Desmond Tutu's** quote (pp. 176-177) is also very compelling; especially the part where he says: "*It is estimated that every year, small arms kill more people than the Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined!*" (WOW!) But I also like his hopeful ending: "*No longer should the peace business be undermined by the arms business.*" May it be so...

The Force of War (pp. 177-179) cites a book by **Chris Hedges** (a war-zone journalist) called *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. The *Force* that Hedges refers to in the book title is raw *human emotion*, which he says controls individuals and societies, and frequently *drives us to war*—he points out that only 29 years of human history have been war-free! In 2002, Wesley Clark spoke of the danger of "*evoking the emotions of war to seek political gain*" (see quote on pp. 177-178.)

This *drive to war*, says Brian, is nothing less than an addiction. **David Korten** says, "*Feeding on it's own illusions, Empire becomes a collective addiction—a psychological dependence on domination, violence, and material excess.*" A drug addict is constantly seeking the next "high." In the case of our "addiction" to war, what would be the "high" we seek? Hedges gives an answer (see quote on p. 178) and calls war a "*potent distraction*" from our daily lives during times of peace, which we tend to find ordinary, boring, depressing etc. (The Shakespeare quote on p. 179 also sums it up pretty well and shows it's not really a "new" thing to prefer war over peace.)

A Weapon of Mass Distraction (pp. 179-180) talks about how war *distracts* us from the lethargy of peacetime complacency. But just as an addict inevitably "hits bottom", wars also "hit bottom" and lose their *mythic* stature. War is eventually exposed as "organized murder" that it is—see quote from Hedges on p. 179. Often the media reinforces the myth of war rather than exposing it for what it really is. Says Hedges, "*Mythic war reporting sells papers and boosts ratings*" (p. 179.)

Hedges also says in his book that the group at war tends to fall into a *collective autism*—i.e., they only listen to those who tell them what they want to hear. Like the addict, they deny they have a problem for as long as possible. They *lie* to themselves (and often *lie* to the people they represent) and avoid dealing with unpleasant or inconvenient truths. This has two undesirable results: 1) wars tend to last longer than they need to; and 2) there is a quick *amnesia* once the war is over—i.e., we quickly forget the *ugly reality* of war once it ends, and soon get "bored" with peace. (Hedges quote on p. 180 is a good summary.)

Twelve step programs teach that it takes a *spiritual program* to cure addiction—and it can be argued that this is true of our world's "addiction" to war. We have to choose a new "program" if we really want to change...

So we face a choice: *Do we live by the peace of the sword or the peace of the Lord?* We have two roads that claim to lead to peace—*shalom*—and both can't be right. Which one will we choose?

QUESTIONS (pp. 180-181)

Chapter 22: Joining Warriors Anonymous (pp. 182-191)

Some will see the preceding chapters as a set-up for a call to embrace *pacifism*, but Brian is quick to say this isn't what he is trying to do. Rather, he would like us all to consider the impact that this "addiction" to war has had on our culture—and especially on the Church. As with any addict, the first step might be admitting we have an "addiction" in the first place. If Jesus is to break our "addiction to war," Brian says that he must:

- Replace our insatiable craving for security with an insatiable craving for something else; and
- Fill the potential "boredom" of peace we've been discussing with something more fulfilling than the "narcotic" of war.

A Craving for Justice (pp. 183-188) suggests that *justice* is the "something else" that Jesus wants us to *crave*—have a consuming passion to pursue. Brian once again returns to the Sermon on the Mount [**Matthew 5:6-7, 9-10**] to reinforce this idea that the *life to the full* that Jesus promises [**John 10:10**] comes to people who *crave not security, not even freedom, but justice*. (In *Note #3 for Chapter 22* (p. 183) Brian points out that often the word "righteousness" is used in the Beatitudes, but a better word choice for translation is actually "justice.")

Brian's conjecture on how Jesus might respond to Chris Hedges is very good: "...it's time to *rethink what kind of fighting you will do... My kingdom invites you to defect from all war making and invest yourselves in peacemaking for God's global interests and the common good of all God's creations on the planet*"—see complete quote on p. 184.

As for the potential "boredom" of peace, living *life to the full* in God's Kingdom keeps us from getting too bored—i.e., doing the kinds of things Jesus describes in the quote on p. 184 should keep us busy. Jesus takes mundane and ordinary things (tasks) and transforms them into dynamic and spirited things (tasks). When life is transformed in this manner, we no longer desire to squander it in war.

From the Sermon on the Mount [**Matthew 5:21-26, 43-48**] (pp. 185-186)

As we embrace this new way of thinking about *security*, we continue to see the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (and all Jesus' teaching) in ways we may not have before. Brian points out that as followers of Jesus¹:

- We recognize the danger of language that dehumanizes the *other*, and do our best to avoid it. In so doing, we nip conflict in the bud before it has a chance to escalate to violence, murder, war, etc. [*vv 21-22*]
- We are eager to resolve interpersonal conflict realizing God prioritizes social reconciliation over religious ritual and observance. [*vv 23-24*]
- We work for reconciliation of interpersonal conflict as quickly as possible, and in so doing avoid getting "sucked" into a vortex that leads to escalating conflict [*vv 25-26*]
- In summary, we seek to shower our enemies with *preemptive kindness*—as Brian puts it, while some may plot evil and destruction, we followers of Christ should *plot goodness*. [*vv 43-46*]

So indeed war is a force that gives us *meaning*, but it turns out to be *false meaning*. Jesus gives us a force that gives *true meaning* to life—*love*. A synonym for *love* in Jesus' vernacular is *neighborliness*. So Jesus teaches us that we can't stop people from defining themselves as our *enemy* (i.e., people have a right to choose how they will identify themselves and we can't force them to be our friend without resorting to domination or coercion) but we can choose how

¹ Dallas Willard's *Divine Conspiracy* has a more extended discussion of the teachings of Jesus in the *Sermon on the Mount* that is quite similar to this.

we will respond to those *enemies*—we can choose the way of *love* and *neighborliness* that Jesus modeled when he was alive and that his followers have tried to continue through the years. That is to say, **our enemy may not choose to be our friend, but we can still choose to be his.**

So people who pursue Jesus' way of *peacemaking* should never really be "bored". There is always urgent work to do! And yet sometimes, given we're so indoctrinated in the dominant *story* of our day, we have a hard time imagining another possibility—a world where *peacemaking* efforts would be taken seriously.

Brian closes the section with a *hopeful* glimpse (seen in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina) of what kind of role the military might play in a more peaceful world where "*instead of dividing the world into allies and enemies this approach would unite the world against common enemies like storm, drought, earthquake, and disease*"—see pp. 187-188.

The Security Strategy of Jesus (pp. 188-189) was a radical break from the prevailing strategies of his day—and is a break from the prevailing strategy of our day. Followers of Jesus (then and now) are called to be actively devoted to *peacemaking*. This isn't a weak or *tame Lion* acquiescing to the status quo of our world because we lack the ability to fight; this is a powerful *real Lion* courageously bearing its teeth and willing to stand against violence and those things that work against the way of Jesus. The Palm Sunday narrative brings the two contrasting *security* strategies we've been discussing into contrast (see pp. 188-189) and it's clear that Jesus is evoking Scripture with his entry [**Psalm 20:7; Zechariah 9:9-10.**]

We Have a Choice (pp. 189-191) of either trying to force the *other* to change or changing *ourselves*. Attempts to force the other to change don't work so well. The only person (or community) we can really change is *ourselves*. We shouldn't change in capitulation to or fear of the *other*, but we should be willing to change to live more in line with the Kingdom of God. In keeping with that thought, Brian asks: *What would it be like to trade the love of power for the power of love?*

This change in the way we live is certainly not easy to accomplish, and it's made even harder when we have preachers who continue the drumbeat of redemptive violence, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, including a call to "*invade their countries, kill their leaders, and convert them to Christianity,*" and to, "... *blow them all away in the name of the Lord.*"—see full quotes on p. 190. I just can't imagine Jesus ever using this kind of language—contrast with the words of **John 18:36**.

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a *descending spiral*, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it... Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. ... The *chain reaction of evil*—hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation. —**Martin Luther King** [Quoted in *EMC*, p. 190.]

QUESTIONS (p. 191)

Part VI: The Prosperity System
(Chapters 23–26)

CONTRASTING THE FOUR "SPIRITUAL LAWS"

Theocapitalism (Chapter 23)	Kingdom of God (Chapters 25 & 26)
<i>Progress through rapid growth</i> (pp. 199-200.) Pursue personal "growth" and "advancement" at any cost—i.e., little regard for impact on the <i>other</i> .	<i>Good deeds for the common good</i> (pp. 213-216.) We do things that benefit the <i>common good</i> —i.e., we consider the impact our actions have the <i>other</i> .
<i>Serenity through possession and consumption</i> (pp. 200-201.) The idea that you can't enjoy something unless you "own" it.	<i>Satisfaction through gratitude and sharing</i> (pp. 216-222.) Give up the futile quest for <i>abstractions</i> and be content with what you have. Life within <i>limits</i> .
<i>Salvation through competition alone</i> (pp. 201-202.) Ideas of Social Darwinism. Survival of the "fittest." Pretty ruthless ideology. Few <i>winners</i> ... and many <i>losers</i> .	<i>Salvation through seeking justice</i> (pp. 224-226.) Rather than thirsting to "grow" or "get ahead" in life, thirst for justice for all of God's world.
<i>Freedom to prosper through unaccountable corporations</i> (pp. 202-205.) Liberation from the need to be dependent on a community.	<i>Freedom to prosper by building better communities</i> (pp. 226-230.) Realization that strong communities are key to true prosperity, not a hindrance.

Chapter 23: Capitalism as God (pp. 195-206)

The [World Bank] is like the church—trying to do good in the world according to what its clergy learned in seminary. But the 'seminaries' are teaching bad theology... Frequent academic advisors to the Bank... keep renewing a bad theology. —Herman Daly [Quoted in EMC, p. 195.]

Economists are like theologians... Every religion other than their own is the invention of man, whereas their own particular brand of religion is an emanation from God. —Karl Marx [Quoted in EMC, pp. 195-196.]

- Ultimately it is *desire* that drives the prosperity system.
- We must confront the question: **What is of true value?**

The Theocapitalist Religion (pp. 196-198) discusses how in many ways, *capitalism* is more than a way of seeking prosperity; it functions like a religion. Catholic theologian **Tom Beaudoin** refers to it as *theocapitalism*. For its many "worshippers" this "religion"...

- Gives us a sense of identity.
- Helps us belong to a community.
- Develops trust.
- Helps us experience *ecstasy*.
- Communicates transcendence.
- Promises *conversion* to a new way of life.
- Promises rest for the restless heart.

Theocapitalism also...

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- Functions like an anonymous spiritual discipline;
- Displays God-like creative powers;
- Fashions humanity in its own image; and
- Presents us with a "perpetual unsolvable identity crisis."

The Four Spiritual Laws of Theocapitalism (pp. 198-205) borrows from Campus Crusade's model to talk about spiritual laws that drive theocapitalism.

Law of Progress Through Rapid Growth (pp. 199-200) *I believe in one God: Progress, maker of all that is, through rapid growth.* The motto is, "Progress at any cost!" Any damage done along the way to other people or to God's world is viewed as *collateral damage* and acceptable as long as we are "getting ahead" or "making progress."

Law of Serenity Through Possession and Consumption (pp. 200-201) *I believe in happiness through owning and using.* Functions kind of like the mafia, where you pay for protection but if you don't pay, your "gonna pay." Since possessing and consuming bring happiness, in order to maintain happiness, you have to possess and consume more and more. Creates within us an insatiable **desire for more stuff.**

Law of Salvation Through Competition Alone (pp. 201-202) *By win-lose competition alone have you been saved.* Ideas based on *Social Darwinism*, which suggests that in order to have only a few big winners, there must be many losers. Those who are "most fit" to prosper rise above the crowd—i.e., Darwin's idea of *survival of the fittest.*

Law of Freedom to Prosper Through Unaccountable Corporations (p. 202-205) *I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic economy, and in the communion of unaccountable corporations.* Characteristics of these corporations... (pp. 203-204)

1. Show a callous unconcern for others.
2. Display incapacity to maintain enduring relationships.
3. Show reckless disregard for the safety of others.
4. Manifest habitual deceitfulness.
5. Fail to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior.
6. Incapable of experiencing guilt—despite gross faults.

Note: This list of characteristics actually comes from a psychiatric guide and the diagnosis of someone displaying this kind of behavior would be—**psychopathic!**

Many corporations seem to live for a **single bottom line**—profit for shareholders—without concern for **other essential bottom lines**—the common ecological good, the common social good, and the ultimate good under the gaze of our creator.

QUESTIONS (pp. 205-206)

Chapter 24: Obligations to Nonexistent Future People (pp. 207-212)

You won't usually hear the four spiritual laws of *theocapitalism* stated overtly but their covert influence is nearly ubiquitous. If Jesus is to have any impact of the crises that our world faces, he must confront this *false deity* and provide a viable alternative. We think we are flying high, but our altimeter is broken; we're actually in free fall. We are plundering our planet's resources and a rapid rate and leaving a devastating legacy for future generations—i.e., they will have to deal with the "mess" that we have made! Our system has limits, and for too long we've ignored them, but it is now catching up to us.

The Impending Apocalypse of Theocapitalism (pp. 209-211)

Theocapitalism will inevitably collapse. The planet has limited resources and we are using them up without replenishing them; that can't be sustained forever. *Theocapitalism* is based on the idea that the more resources we use and the more waste we produce, the better off we'll be. It somewhat naively assumes that we don't have to worry about the consequences of our overconsumption ideal in terms of resource shortages, toxicity from waste, and war between nations competing over ever-shrinking natural resources. We sort of bury our head in the sand and abdicate responsibility, and we leave the consequences of our actions for future generations to address? But if we don't do something different—and soon—the system may very well collapse. It is imperative that we learn to live within limits, consuming less and becoming more self-sufficient. We have to come to the point where we realize that *growth*—the consumption of more and more—is not the solution to all our problems.

Scripting a Better Story (pp. 211-212) For too long, we have forgotten our obligations to the people not yet born. We must come up with a new vision or our dominant framing story will become our obituary. Does the message of Jesus offer us that alternative story? Perhaps he does; but he's asking those of us who call ourselves his followers to help him "write" it.

QUESTIONS (p. 212)

Chapter 25: Quick Bliss through Footwear, Palate Grease, and Skin Paint (pp. 213-222)

The next two chapters address building a new kind of prosperity system—what Brian called *God's love economy*—as part of *God's sacred ecosystem*. Four laws are presented in contrast to the four that drive *theocapitalism*—see Table above.

Law of Good Deeds for the Common Good (pp. 213-216) discusses developing a sustainable economy based on fruitfulness as opposed to consumption. Brian uses the parable of the rich young fool [**Luke 12:13-21**—see p. 214 for discussion] to illustrate an unsustainable economic system—when we are withdrawn into the world of our own self-interest, we tend to neglect the common good. It seems more important to Jesus that we amass "good deeds" than it to amass "material wealth." The Apostle Paul says we should be "*rich in good deeds*" [**1 Timothy 6:18-19** □ **Matthew 6:19-21.**] In Jesus' view the worse punishment—i.e., hell—may be reserved for those who are rich and comfortable and proceed on their way with no regard for their poor neighbor day after day [**Luke 16:19; Luke 10: 25-37**].

Jesus calls us to leave our pursuit of personal wealth and instead pursue doing good deeds for the common good.

Law of Satisfaction Through Gratitude and Sharing (pp. 216-222) notes that in the past, *consumption* was a term used to describe a wasting disease, but now *consumption* is the duty of all adherents of theocapitalism. In Genesis, consumption is closely linked to human evil. Adam & Eve had **one** limit placed upon them but they exceeded it [**Genesis 3**] and set in motion an *avalanche of alienation* for human beings—from God, from one another, from creation. **Genesis** gives a genealogy for all of the pain and evil in the whole social structure of humans on planet Earth: it all can be traced back to a problem of *consumption beyond limits*.

How ironic then that consumption would be prescribed as the cure for the disease of consumption. As it turns out, the notion that *consumption = happiness* or *possession = happiness* is just not working—Brian cites a number of interesting statistics here [pp. 218-219] to back up this claim. In short, the U.S. is increasingly more prosperous but increasingly less happy.

We live in a culture driven by a *relentless pursuit of abstract ideas* (e.g., more, better, latest, youth, beauty, fashion, cool, growth, etc.) The material things themselves don't count: what counts is the abstraction, the immaterial idea behind the stuff. These immaterial ideas can **never** be obtained □ you will always need more *stuff*.

If we are relentlessly pursuing more and more, then we never have time to enjoy what we have [this is the point of **Matthew 16:26**.] *Gratitude*, then, is an act of defiant contemplation, a celebration of what we do have, and a chance to connect with the source of the gifts—God. *Fasting* [**Matthew 4:4**] can also be an effort to discipline consumption.

Brian points out **Mark 6:30-44** [see p. 221 for discussion] as an example of "counting what we already have because what we already have counts," and a demonstration of a new economy that doesn't depend on buying more and spending more, but on discovering what you already have and sharing it. The story illustrates *contemplative gratitude* and *neighborly sharing*.

The last paragraph of p. 222 is very powerful, ending with, "*The Gospels dare us to believe.*"

QUESTIONS (p. 222)

Chapter 26: Collaboration for Co-liberation (pp. 223-231)

The chapter begins with a discussion of why Jesus chose to focus his ministry in the region of Galilee. This was an area that had suffered disproportionately under Rome and was prone to insurrection and unrest. Brian points out that Galilee is the context for the Sermon on the Mount. He draws particular focus on "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.*" —**Matthew 5:6**.

Law of Salvation Through Seeking Justice (pp. 224-226) points out that relentless pursuit of abstraction leads to dividing the world into winners and losers. **We won't be saved by dominating our competition; we'll be saved by relentless pursuit of justice.**

Brian uses **Matthew 20:20-28** as an illustration here. The mother of James and John wants to see her boys make it to the top. The other 10 disciples get upset when they hear about this conversation. Jesus has to set them all straight—v 25-28. If you want to be a leader in the Kingdom of God, you have to be willing to be *servant* to all and you should expect to suffer.

As followers of Christ, we should be marked by a relentless pursuit of forgiveness and justice for others, rather than always trying to evade justice and responsibility for our actions—e.g., Brian points out that too often our theology focuses on *hell-evasion*, and not enough on seeking justice. The idea that Jesus tries to drive home in the Sermon on the Mount is that seeking prosperity as an end in itself is a fruitless quest that is never truly satisfied—one might even call it suicidal—but, on the other hand, seeking justice for all will lead to true and lasting prosperity—**Matthew 6:33**.

Law of Freedom to Prosper by Building Better Communities (pp. 226-230) talks about where true freedom is found—when rich and poor come together and build better communities. The 20th century represented a battle between two ideologies—*communism* and *capitalism*. Both ideologies pitted the rich *versus* the poor. In *communism*, the poor were considered morally good and the rich morally bad; in *capitalism*, or *theocapitalism* as we've called it, it was the opposite—i.e., rich people are rich because they work hard and get ahead, and poor people are lazy and don't apply themselves. The rich must continue to get richer so that wealth "trickles down" to the poor.

The message of Jesus suggests that neither the communists nor the capitalists really got it right... or totally wrong. Both the poor and rich need *saving*—the former need saving from *oppressive poverty*, the latter from *addictive wealth*. The rich need to be challenged to stop exploiting the poor, and the poor need to be challenged to stop viewing themselves as victims. Both must learn to work together for the *common good* of the Kingdom of God.

Brian uses the story of Zacchaeus (**Luke 19:1-10**) to illustrate how Jesus confronts the idea that one obtains *freedom through trust in elites*—see discussion on p. 228. Zacchaeus represents the *Herodian compromise* of Jesus' day. He has a dual identity; on one hand he is a Jew, but on the other, he works for the Romans as a tax collector. So when Jesus opts to have dinner at Zacchaeus' house, it would not go over well with other Jews. But, Jesus, as always, has a plan. He will sit down to dinner with this *fence-straddler* in order to create space for Zacchaeus to *repent*—to defect from the dominant system where one prospers by looking out for one's own personal advancement and growth and embrace the Kingdom of God where one looks out for the *common good*—i.e., one ultimately "prosper" when everyone prospers.

We should not make rich people out to be cold-hearted and evil; many of them have in fact worked hard to get ahead and thus have a right to their wealth to an extent. But the question is: **What are they doing with their wealth?** Are they using it solely for personal growth and advancement or are they using it to work for the common good of society? *Theocapitalism* stresses a *single bottom line* of maximizing the return on our investment—i.e., making a profit—but in God's love economy the *bottom line* is exchanged for the *top line* of the common good.

Brian uses a story from **Luke 12:42-48** to illustrate this idea. **The most important thing in God's eyes is not making a profit on our investment, but rather, taking good care of those who work under us.** There are two examples given to illustrate a manager that "gets it" and another that does not—e.g., he is very harsh to his employees and not responsible for his own actions. The point is, **wealth and power should not be a *carte blanche* for unaccountability, but rather a privilege that brings with it increased responsibility and accountability**—see **Luke 12:48**.

Our **global economy** tends to rely heavily on collaboration between corporate elites and hence there is a fundamental lack of *accountability* and

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responsibility. **Local communities** (those that still exist) are based more on *neighborliness*—perhaps *Mr. Rogers* was on to something. □ Jesus' teaching is clear on this subject. Try as we might at times, we cannot escape our call to be *neighbors*, whether those "neighbors" live across the street or around the world—and even if they are total strangers or perceived as "our enemy."

Distance does not decide who is your brother and who is not. — **Bono** [Quoted in *EMC*, p. 230.]

When economics is transformed in light of the framing story of the Kingdom of God—Brian calls it *God's love economy*—it becomes much more interesting and exciting field. Viewed through the "lens" of the Kingdom of God, the "economy" prospers as more and more people discover what makes them come alive and start doing that thing, not for themselves, but for the common good of the world. A thriving love economy is sustained when more and more people learn to be grateful for what they have (as opposed to being obsessed with the relentless pursuit of abstract ideas like better, more, etc.!), and who generously share what they have with others who are in need (as opposed to hoarding it all away for themselves.) It is also characterized by a relentless pursuit for justice (as opposed to progress and prosperity) because as more and more people achieve justice, true prosperity will follow. (See Brian's description on p. 230)

It's a grand dream, far from reality in many ways, but closer than we may think. It's the kind of dream that can turn the prosperity system from suicide to hope.
— *EMC*, p. 230.

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