



LIVING CLEAN  
*in a Polluted World*

JONATHAN FOSTER

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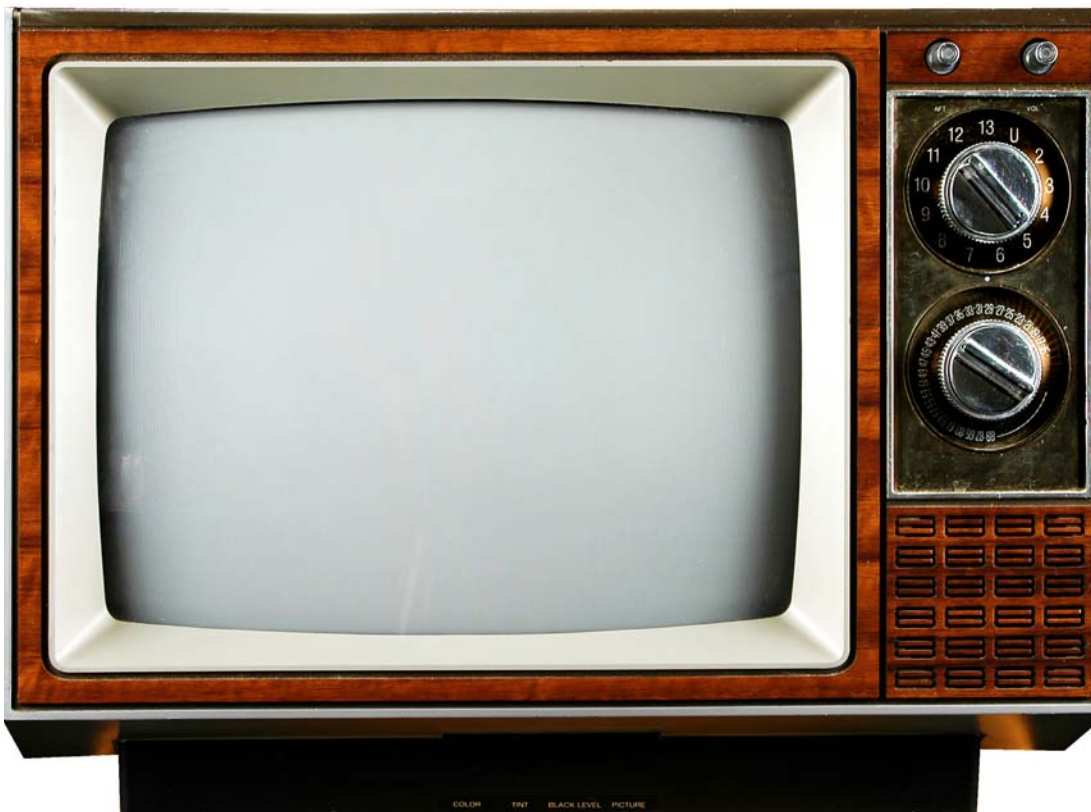
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In 1960 public discourse in America changed forever with the televised debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. This was the first time for a televised debate. This was the last time **image** was undervalued in a televised debate. Interestingly, those who listened to the radio generally believed Nixon had bested Kennedy. But television viewers saw it differently. Literally. In their judgment, Kennedy was the winner.<sup>1</sup> Whatever else was taking place, it was clear that Kennedy's appearance, mannerisms, and "on camera" skills were superior to Nixon. He appeared more relaxed, less uptight and healthier. In other words, **form won out over substance**. I quickly add, I am not suggesting Kennedy was an inferior candidate nor am I implying that the American viewers were less savvy than American listeners. Others, more intelligent than me have weighed in on those topics. What I'm highlighting is that the medium of television proved to be more effective for the "camera friendly." Therefore, it was inevitable that a candidate's image would influence voters more than a candidate's platform. More specifically, **the image became the platform**. Of course, image had always played a role in politics and all other arenas but the medium of television amplified the effect to an unprecedented level. Public discourse was affected. The culture never looked back. Substance would no longer drive us. We would be driven by image. This was a pivotal moment in our culture and the primary driving force behind this moment was technology. Without technology, specifically the television, this change would have been impossible.<sup>2</sup>



Marshal McLuhan, a philosopher and media analyst from the 20th century is famous for coining the phrase, **"The medium is the message."**<sup>3</sup> For McLuhan, the message of television was less about what those on television said and more about the way television conditioned us to learn, to observe and receive. Television's content must be packaged in a particular way to work, and because of the prevalence of the television (now any media screen) in our culture we have become accustomed to this packaging.



(Think Steve Martin as you read the next three sentences.)

And now I'm going to do something difficult. I am going to perform a bit of mental gymnastics. I am going to use a line from a television show to help highlight the ubiquitous role television shows play in our society. Do not try this at home without expert assistance.

(OK, back to regular voice.)

The television program Star Trek has become one of the most popular shows of all time. While I am not a "Trek-kie", I do recognize a line from one of Star Trek's greatest antagonist, the Borg. Perniciously, the Borg would not physically attack their enemy. Rather, they would initiate a form of mind meld, in order to control their opponents will. The line made famous by the Borg is, **"We are the Borg. You will be assimilated."** And the last part is, "Resistance is....". Go ahead; fill in the blank. That's right, "Resistance is futile."

Their intention has probably been less menacing than the Borg, but the agents of the technological-age we live in have in effect, expressed this same decree: Society... you will be assimilated.

McLuhan has been proven right. The medium has become the message.

The media driven, technological age we live in has become all-consuming.

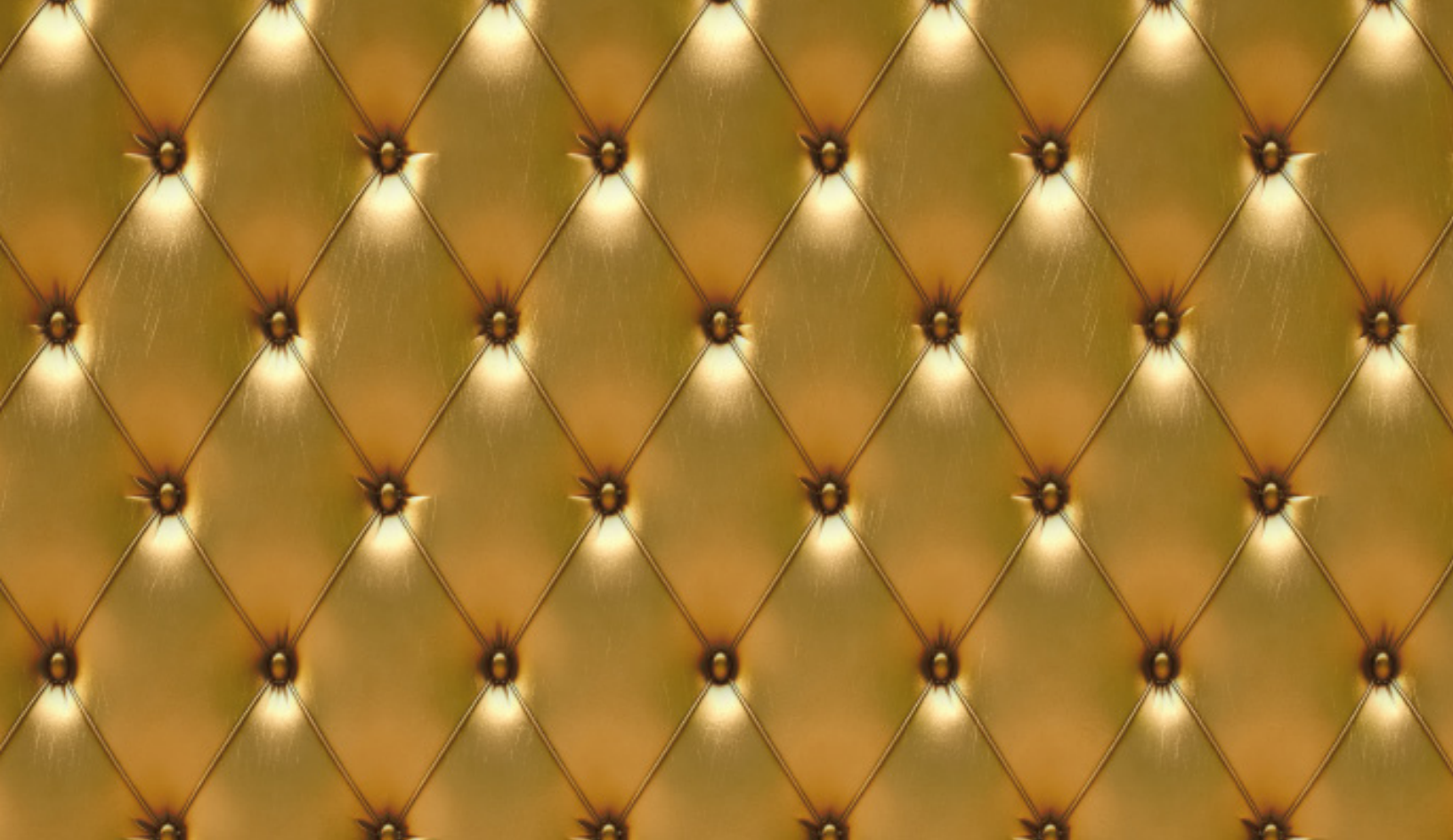
**We have all been assimilated.**

Before we go any further I should make sure you know this is not an anti-technological rant. Would it not be ironic to denigrate technology while typing these words on a computer knowing they will live on a web page, e-book or even be printed into book form with the aid of machines? So, that's not my intention. Rather, what you are reading is an effort to raise questions about the biosphere we all share so easily polluted by tyrannical stories, patterns, systems, behaviors and men. (I leave women out because I have not met any women yet who were tyrants. For sure, some of them are misguided or delusional but tyranny seems to be served up best by the male gender. Plus, my mom is a woman.)





In case you are unaware, the Bible (finally he mentions the Bible!) was written completely and unapologetically from a Hebrew context. Trying to understand the Bible without understanding some basic Hebrew concepts is like trying to ride a bike with a flat tire. At best the handling is poor and at worst you are going to have an accident. Yes, one of the dominant themes of the New Testament is God's acceptance for everyone regardless of ethnicity, but even that story winds up being played out from a Jewish vantage point.



So, from the Jewish vantage point there are two major antagonists: Egypt and Babylon. (Booo! Hiss! OK, quiet down now.) Egypt comes to the forefront toward the latter part of the book of Genesis. Initially, the relationship between the Hebrews (the Israelites) and Egypt was good. In fact, it began with the patriarch of Israel blessing Pharaoh.<sup>4</sup> But time did not favor the relationship. An irrational, fearful Pharaoh grew increasingly antagonistic. Throughout chapter 47 of Genesis, Israel slowly descended from relative freedom to enslavement. They gave their money. Next, they gave their livestock. Finally, they gave their land. By verse 25 they declared themselves “in bondage to Pharaoh.”<sup>5</sup> As we turn the pages into the book of Exodus, we find that while **the Israelites had grown their population, their freedom had diminished.** The relationship that began with promise had turned implacably cold. They were now completely enslaved to Egypt, to Pharaoh and the Pharaohs to come.

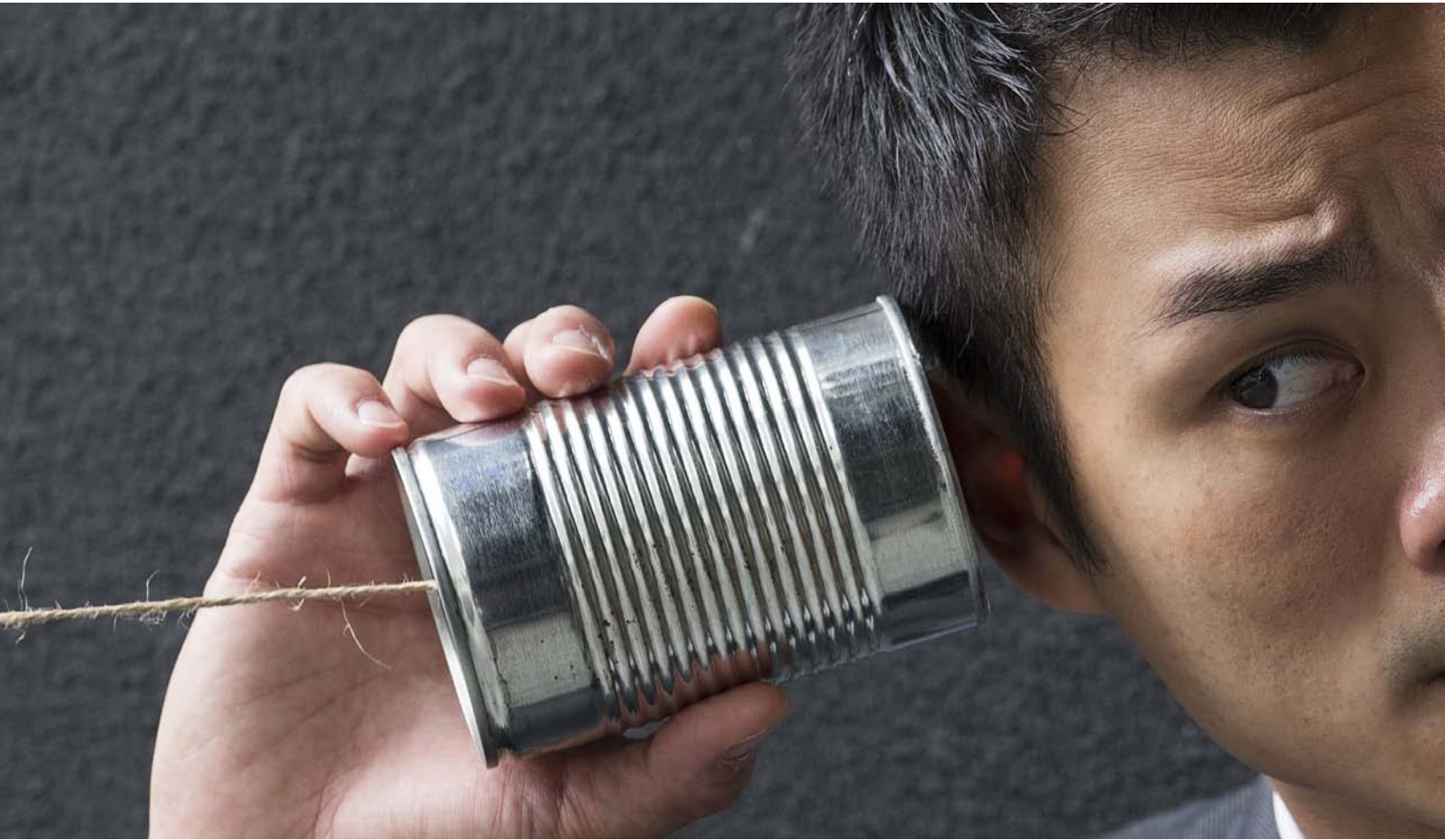
As Walter Brueggemann writes,

“From the outset, Pharaoh, blessed by God’s Nile, was the leader of the breadbasket of the world. By his own actions and those of his food czar Joseph, Pharaoh advanced the claims of the state against his own subjects, achieving a monopoly on land and on the food supply. That land and food supply became a tax base whereby wealth was systematically transferred from the peasant-slaves to the central monopoly.”<sup>6</sup>





Pharaoh's exploitation and abuse belied the insecurity and greed that drove him. Ironically, **"the one with most is the one who is most anxious in irrational ways."**<sup>7</sup> Pharaoh is one of the world's first case studies in unrestrained power which proves to be damaging both to the recipients of the power and to the power holder himself.



Finally, the Israelites cried out and in chapter 3 of Exodus, God intervened. He found Moses, an Israelite himself, on the side of a mountain, tending sheep. Through a burning bush God said,

*“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land... And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”<sup>8</sup>*



Notice the pronouns,  
I have seen...  
I have heard...  
I am concerned...  
I have come down to rescue....  
I have seen...  
**I am sending you** (Moses).



Imagine you are Moses. First of all, a bush is burning but not being consumed. Crazy. Secondly, God is speaking to you. Overwhelming. Finally, God is not only speaking to you but He indicates He is aware of your family's long-standing, deep problems. This is a miracle. God is going to do something! If you are Moses, you are at Defcon Level 5 excitement at this point. But, after God says, "I, I, I, I, I..." he says, "You".

If you are still imagining yourself as Moses, what are you thinking now? One word: Me? Followed by a lot of other words: But you are the one burning this bush. You are the one talking out of thin air. You are God. Why me? Why would I go?

If you were Moses, you would not have seen this coming either.



But, this is how God works. He finds men and women to carry out His plans. He listens for cries, He finds a willing heart and then He calls. This calling is the moment where Walter Brueggemann says, **“holy intention meets human agency.”**<sup>9</sup> This is how God defeats tyrants. He places a valuable message inside a willing heart. In fact, it is foreshadowing of how the whole world will be redeemed. Some, who call themselves Christians, are unaware of the valuable treasure they carry inside.

Now that you are finished picturing yourself as Moses, imagine you are a low paid courier in an out of the way country town who has been asked to deliver the last package of the day. You are handed something weighty in a small, crumpled up brown bag. You grab the package and throw it through the open passenger window of your truck. Your CD player connected through your cassette deck is blaring. Squirrels flinch because your treble is stuck wide open. You head off to your destination. On the way, you take a route that runs by your friend's house. You stop to say hi and eat a donut. While consuming more donuts you watch nine episodes of Buffy the Vampire Slayer on Netflix. The sum of all this activity is that you lose track of time. It is obviously too late to deliver the package now, so you head home and park the truck out on the street. Three of the tires are on the street. One is on your front curb. You toss the keys into the open window where they spend the night on the floorboard.

Getting into your truck the following morning you find the package is damp with water from the previous night's drizzle. You do your best to towel dry the bag as you finally head to the destination. Standing on the customer's front porch, tossing the now soggy, extra-crumpled package up in the air with one hand you casually ring the doorbell with the other. The lady opens the door, signs the wrinkled delivery sheet and receives your delivery. Hands in your pockets, rambling back to your truck you hear a gasp. As you turn you see the lady with her mouth open holding the brightest stone you have ever seen. (Either in real life or in Legend of Zelda.) You learn later that in fact, the lady had inherited the largest diamond in the entire world. Feeling a little light-headed, you think of the world's most priceless treasure being carried in your glazed-donut-stained hands. Can you imagine how embarrassed you would have been about the casual way you treated that package? Can you imagine how you would have wished you could retrace your steps and take care of that delivery in the way it deserved? I think in a small way this resembles what it is like for many of us who call ourselves Christians. We simply do not realize value of the treasure placed inside of us. **Knowing the value of what you carry makes all the difference.**<sup>10</sup>

Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul, the Apostle, this way, "All we are are **messengers**... errand runners from Jesus..." And later, "If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives." (2 Corinthians 5:5-8 The Message)






Moses must have realized the value of what he was carrying. In chapter five of Exodus, he delivered God's message to Pharaoh. One of the great power-shift moments in Scripture occurred during this exchange, as Moses demanded that Pharaoh free the Israelites. Pharaoh responded indignantly, "Who is the Lord that I should let Israel go? I do not know this Lord."<sup>11</sup> You can hear the contempt dripping from his voice. In time, Moses gave Pharaoh ten compelling reasons to let the Israelites go. Little by little Pharaoh began to break down. It did not happen all at once because a tyrant never goes down easily. But finally, by the end of chapter five he completely relented. The shift was complete. Pharaoh's great power was irretrievable.

But, to be clear this massive shift in power did not occur when Moses confronted Pharaoh. It happened previous to that encounter. It occurred earlier, on the side of the desert mountain when Moses decided to be a carrier of God's holy intention. **You see, the power never shifts when the power shifts. The power always shifts sometime before the power shifts.** Realizing God is going to change your circumstances before the circumstances actually change takes courageous faith but in that moment the matter is settled. In that moment God has started something and God always finishes what He starts.



A photograph of a wind turbine in a field of tall grass under a cloudy sky. The turbine is the central focus, with its three blades extending upwards. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds, and the foreground is dominated by the silhouettes of tall grasses. The overall mood is serene and natural.

All right, quick quiz. The first major antagonist in Israel's history is who? Good, you have been paying attention. It is Egypt. By the way, I should mention that none of this needs to be taken as derogatory toward modern day Egypt, or a modern day equivalent of the second part of our Axis of Evil: **Babylon.**

(cue the music, duh-duh-duh-duh.)



And now a quick historical recap... the Exodus happened around 1,400BC. Israel circuitously made its way to the Promised Land. Over the next few hundred years they settled into their new home. Around 1,000BC Saul became king. Saul's reign did not work out too well, so David was anointed as the next king. David had some character issues but by and large his reign was a smashing success. The kingdom grew. The borders were solidified and the outlook was positive. His son, Solomon, succeeded him in the 900'sBC but unfortunately did not set Israel up for long-term success. Immediately upon his death the kingdom fell apart. After that point in time, the northern area was referred to as Israel and the southern area was referred to as Judah. In the 700'sBC, the northern tribes were conquered by Assyria. The southern kingdom held out a few generations but in 586BC, Judah was conquered by Babylon. This was a poignant and pivotal moment in Israel's history. God's chosen people, delivered from the house of Egypt, and given a new home were now forcefully moved to the house of Babylon. **Babylon became the second great tyrant for the Hebrews.**

But there was a difference between Egypt and Babylon. Egypt was more of a classic tyrant: forced labor, harsh living conditions, no rights or privileges, etc. Babylon was more of an indirect tyrant. Yes, of course Israel directly lost their land and many perished while the remainder were forced to relocate because of Babylon. But, once there they were allowed to live together in communities, to farm and work. They earned income. Eventually, many of them became wealthy. The prophet Jeremiah said to them,

*“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”<sup>12</sup>*

What happened to the Hebrews was not good but Babylon was not Egypt. In Egypt none of the Hebrews owned land or prospered. There was never any temptation to become a part of the Egyptian culture. But Babylon was a different story. Scott Daniels says it this way,

“Babylon holds a special place in the great and populated pantheon of Jewish oppressors and captors, especially for the biblical prophets. Particularly in the book of Daniel, the reader discovers that the primary problem of Israel’s second great exile was that life in Babylon wasn’t nearly as oppressive as their days of slavery in Egypt. Egypt violently oppressed the Israelites. Although many people died at the hand of Pharaoh, the children of Israel were not invited or tempted to become Egyptians. The distinct problem of the Babylonian exile was that the culture of Babylon gave enough freedom and offered enough wealth and power to their Israelite and Judean captives that the greatest risk the people faced was not slavery and oppression but that their children would become Babylonians. In fact, when we read the famous stories of the Hebrew children facing the fiery furnace rather than bowing to the king and Daniel accepting the lions’ den rather than accepting restrictions to his faith, we realize that their faith was demonstrated in their ability to resist the lure of the Babylonian empire and not be assimilated into or be conformed to the culture.<sup>13</sup>





So, in Babylon the Hebrew people faced a different kind of problem. They had to learn how to not conform to the culture. **Babylon is Borg to Israel's Starfleet.** Babylon all but said to their captors, "You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile."

But Israel was never meant to stay in Babylon. God knew this from the beginning. Even as Jeremiah told his colleagues to settle down he reminds them this is not forever. He lets them know God will find them and "bring them back from captivity."<sup>14</sup> The question will be: **Will they want to return home?**



I hope you are seeing the difference between Egypt and Babylon and realizing at this point that tyrants can take all different sizes and shapes. A tyrant can be a man such as Pharaoh, Hitler, Napoleon, Ivan the Terrible (or any other number of villains from Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian.)

A tyrant can be also be a nation/state like Egypt, Babylon, Rome, Germany or North Korea. And (spoil alert - here's where we're going with all of this) either one of these tyrants, but especially the second type typically fosters systems and patterns, which become types of tyrant themselves.

It is obvious the Westernized world does not answer to a Pharaoh... but what about a Babylon? Is it possible we live in a Babylonian environment where all kinds of systems are floating around in the air? I think many of us would say it is not only possible but it is likely. So, what are they? What are the obscure tyrannical systems making up the air all around us? The following is not an exhaustive list. (Does one exist?) But, here are seven possibilities worthy of our attention.



- Individualism: The system whispering, I am at the center of it all.
- Consumerism: The system promoting the idea that I am what I consume.
- Nationalism: The system enabling me to worship my country.
- Capitalism: The system telling me it is all about money.
- Informationism: The system saying more information will liberate me.
- Moral Relativism: The system that says everything is relative. No one really knows the truth.
- Technology: The system making me obsessed with the next version. The next version will save me.<sup>15</sup>



Certainly, there is neutral material within each system listed. In part, this explains why the systems themselves are at times difficult to identify. But, when pursued with reckless abandon as they often are in our current culture, pathogens grow. Great influence is wielded by just one system. Working in concert, they become powerful culture-shapers.

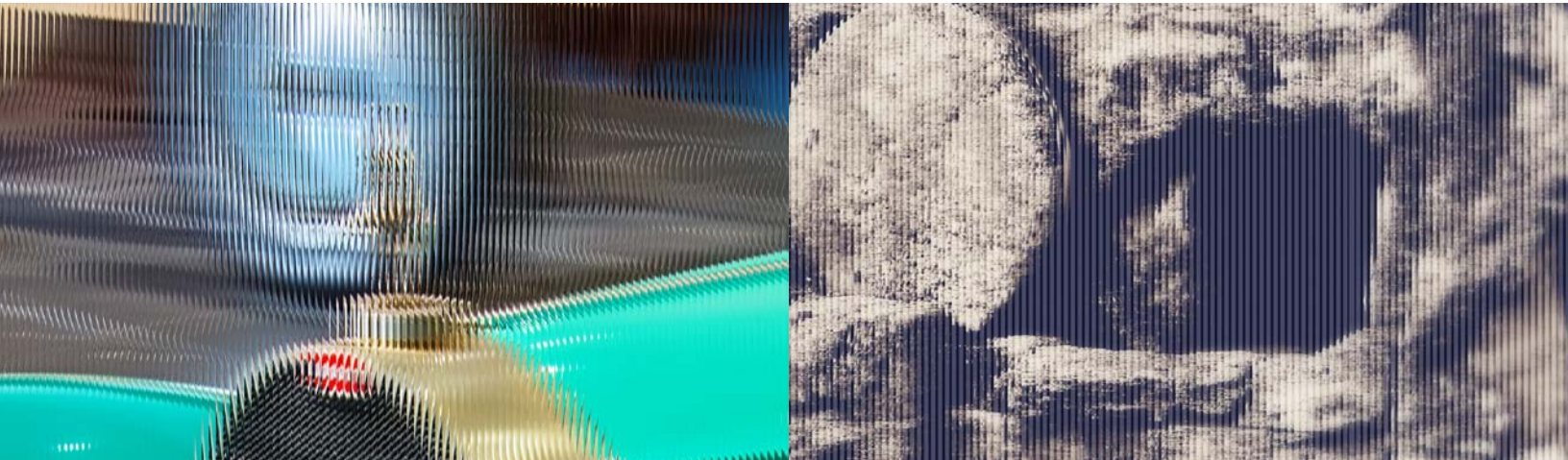
The reality is, we do not live under an Egyptian tyrant. We live within and under a very powerful Babylonian tyrant and **all of us breathe this air.**

All of this brings to mind a certain piece of encouragement Paul, the Apostle wrote to friends in Rome,

*“Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”<sup>16</sup>*

Question... OK, several questions... Are you so well adjusted to the culture that you identify with it more than with God? What is shaping you? Are you deeply inhaling the pathogenic systems? Or are you allowing the crystal clean air of God to detox you from the inside? By the way, how does one become changed from the inside out? Good question. Let’s start with lenticular photography.





Have you ever heard of lenticular photographs? You have undoubtedly seen them, but you may not have known their name. When a lenticular photo is slightly shifted the image on the photograph appears to move. These are popular on business cards, billboards and even credit cards. My first recollection of lenticular photography was opening up a box of Cracker Jacks as a boy and pulling out the prize. "Yay, a prize! I'll put it in the pocket of my toughskin jeans and go climb a tree!" (Yes, this is what we did in the 70's. We were very cool.)

On another occasion, I remember receiving a lenticular photograph as a type of award at Vacation Bible School. I thought it was great because when you looked at the image from one angle you saw a cave with a stone in front. But, from another angle you saw the stone had rolled away. **This was the proof I was looking for.** I remember thinking, "Everyone should see this. This is undeniable evidence that the tomb is empty!" (I am sure I didn't use those exact words, but that was my sentiment.)



Now, back to Paul. He reminded his Roman friends that to conform blindly to culture is a sure-fire way to be sunk by culture. As we keep the lenticular idea in mind we realize that this is the way in which we need to view the culture. We need to be able to “shift the image” in order to get an accurate picture. Getting attached to the wrong picture will sink us. This challenges our old way of thinking.

So, to jumpstart our newfound desire to live in a lenticular fashion, here are seven questions to consider. (There are many more, but seven is a good Biblical number representing completeness. So why push it?) Let’s just start by directing our attention to the technological system. Specifically, let’s ask some questions of our smart phones. To show you how this is done, I will allow you to listen in to the conversation I am about to have with my smart phone.

**Hey, I don't want to be rude. You are pretty much always there for me, but I have a few questions for you. I am a little nervous so (ahem) excuse me. All right...**

**1. Because of you (remember I am talking to my phone) I can access more information than high level government officials could access a mere generation ago. However, does this actually make my life better? Does more information clarify or confuse things?**

**2. It is true. I have always enjoyed your technology. Then again, what I really enjoy is your next version. Why is there always the next version? Are you teaching me to remain in a state of discontent? Furthermore, is my attention located on your next version because of how it will improve my life or is it located there because I'm leveraging you for status?**

**3. It is truly amazing you can help me find so many answers so quickly. Nonetheless, I cannot help but wonder what is happening to my attention span? Am I conditioning my brain to be satisfied with your first answer in spite of the fact that it may be misleading, misguided or blatantly wrong? When it comes time to really "dig" for truth, will I have the perseverance to do so?**

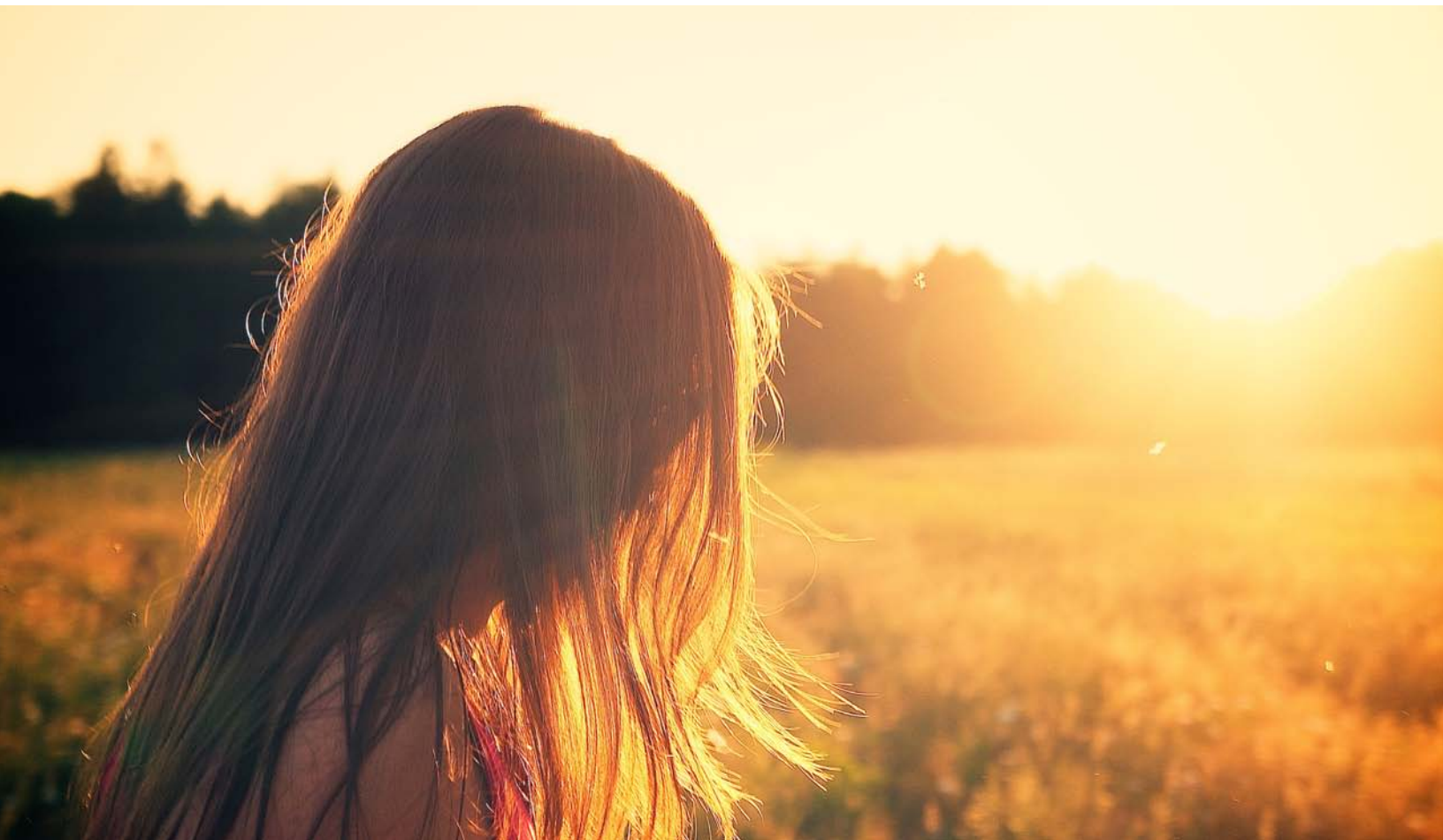


**4. Human beings are social creatures, so it is no surprise that we've created you to help us connect through tools such as social media. I am thankful you help me stay in touch with so many people that I otherwise would not be able to. Although, honestly, I find I am tempted to waste time on social media activities like checking my number of "likes" (i.e. follows, comments, stars, checks, retweets, digs, pops, hits, favorites, etc.). Is it possible I am attempting to use you to fill a void you cannot fill? Do I easily forget when my "likes" dwindle that there is One who has liked me since the day I began to be woven together in my mother's womb?**

**5. There is no doubt being able to shop from your screen is convenient. But, it is anything but convenient to have to wade through your countless advertising links, taglines and gimmicks. Is the 24/7 broadcast of products and services all you care about? McLuhan said, "All advertising advertises advertising."<sup>17</sup> If this is true, you realize you are promoting yourself over and over and over, right? What part do I play in feeding your appetite for all this advertising? What does it say about society when you essentially color all of our virtual and physical sightlines? Chesterton said, "It's really not as repulsive to see the poor asking for money as seeing the rich ask for more money. And advertising is the rich asking for more money."<sup>18</sup>**

**6. I am blessed to live in a day and age where your technology has enriched my life. However, how much are the blessings you give implicating me in the growing gap between the rich and poor? Is it possible that right now, without telling me, you are working faster and more efficient because you are utilizing metals mined in a country like say... The Republic of Congo? This is a country rife with war over its minerals, metals and land. Despite its abundant natural resources the rest of the world seems to benefit from, the Congolese are growing poorer. Are you aware of this? What role do you play in this travesty? Because of our relationship, what role do I now play?**

7. Finally, I would say there is little doubt I love the experience your moving images provide as they leap off of my screen, but, be honest with me... are you revealing everything? Fifty-four years after the first televised presidential debate I am wondering if I have learned anything about the way truth and image often deviate from each other. Look, you are great at projecting images but do you know truth?





I believe it is important to wrestle with these kinds of questions. I believe they begin to help us clarify the way Jesus talked and lived. While it may be an oversimplification to suggest Jesus' only goal was to expose tyrannical systems, it is interesting to imagine his actions as a kind of shifting of lenticular images.

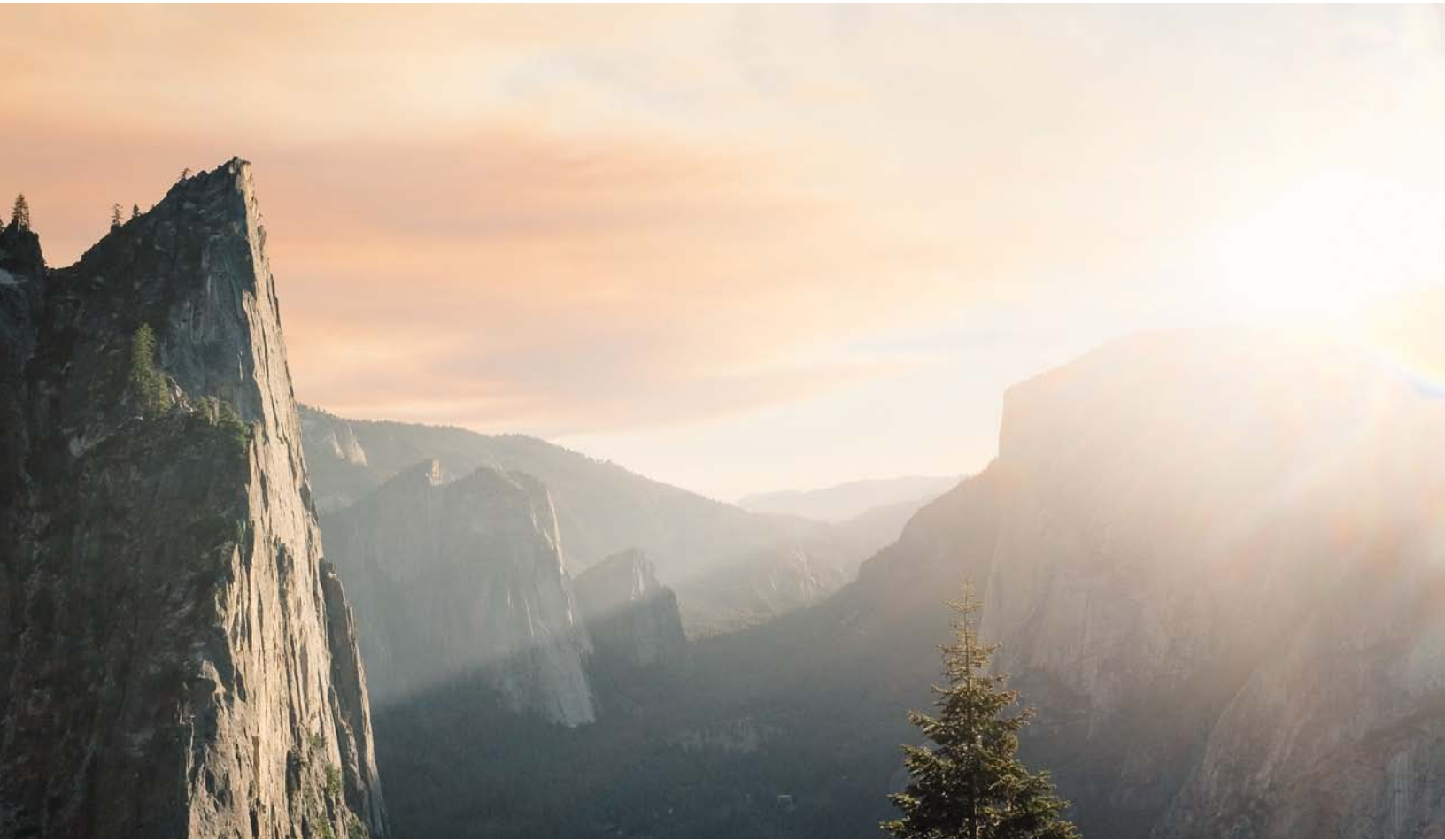
It is not a stretch to view his dialogue with Pilate as tilting the **relativism system** just enough to help us glimpse how truth, without God's foundation, will constantly shift on us.

When he turns water into wine, he is, in part, shifting the **nationalistic system** image. In doing so, he shows us purity through the traditional, national religion was the old way but that he, himself is the new way.

I believe his interaction with the rich young ruler moves the **capitalistic system** slightly to help us all see the truth behind what money can do to us.



So, both invisible and visible tyrants are constantly working against us. We need to be able to develop ways to view them from different angles so we can tell what we are up against... so we can change our way of thinking. Of course, sooner or later we will be confused, tripped up or otherwise defeated if our hope lies in our own ability to see clearly. We need more. We need hope. What we need is a miracle.



So let's turn our attention to the cornerstone of our faith: the resurrection of Jesus. Yes, let's talk about the implications of the resurrection. There are only about a thousand or so. We don't have all day so we will have to narrow it down. Hmm... how about 432? 158? No? 19? OK, how about 1? Thanks to the thoughtfulness of N.T. Wright, I think I can narrow it down to 1.

As you know, resurrection defeats death. Every time. And "death is the tyrants last weapon".<sup>19</sup> Think about it. What is Pilate or Herod or the Jewish religious leaders going to do? Kill him again? If you have come back from the dead, there are no more weapons! Game over. Christ exiting the tomb ensured not only His victory but also the victory at the end of the ages. The date of the end of the ages is immaterial. The resurrection guarantees one day **"the reconciliation of all things will be complete."**<sup>20</sup> We may not be able to see it yet but a victorious ending is inevitable. Remember how Moses took what God gave him and changed the world? Remember how Pharaoh fought until the bitter end? That was foreshadowing of how Jesus would do the same. He changed the world, but our spiritual enemy will fight to the end. We have not witnessed the power shift, but it has already shifted! This gives us hope. This is our miracle.



Look at it this way. It goes without saying, but World War II was a massive, complex, multi-layered war involving millions of people. If you polled historians most would say the turning point in the war was June 6, 1944.<sup>21</sup> D-Day: the invasion of Germany's Western front on the beaches of Normandy, France. Before the Allied forces stormed the beach the war very much hung in the balance. The world was amazingly close to being subjected to an old-fashioned, oppressive tyrant. But after June 6, and the sacrifice of thousands of men had been given, the end was guaranteed. There was still a year before the war concluded because **tyrants never go down without a fight**. Hitler was no exception. Like Pharaoh, all those years ago, he held out, complained, negotiated until the last moment before he gave up.



In a similar way, the moment Jesus stepped out of the grave the outcome was determined. Those who follow Christ will experience wholeness, redemption and reconciliation. I do not mention this to drum up some strain of triumphalist, Christian excitement. Rather, I mention this to highlight where we are headed. This is where our hope lies. This is our identity. Most of our problems can be directly traced to our inability or unwillingness to locate our identity in the hope of the resurrection. Instead, we settle for locating it in the circumstances around us.



In other words we assume that since the air is polluted, we must be polluted as well. Well, yes, there is plenty of pollution to go around but we are not people who delight in pollution, but people who rejoice in the truth. The truth is Jesus is alive, and the end has already been determined. This is our identity. This is our miracle.

**Breathe  
deeply  
of  
this  
truth.**

So, what do we do with the aforementioned systems? How are we to rid ourselves of their tyranny?

I'm not sure we can.



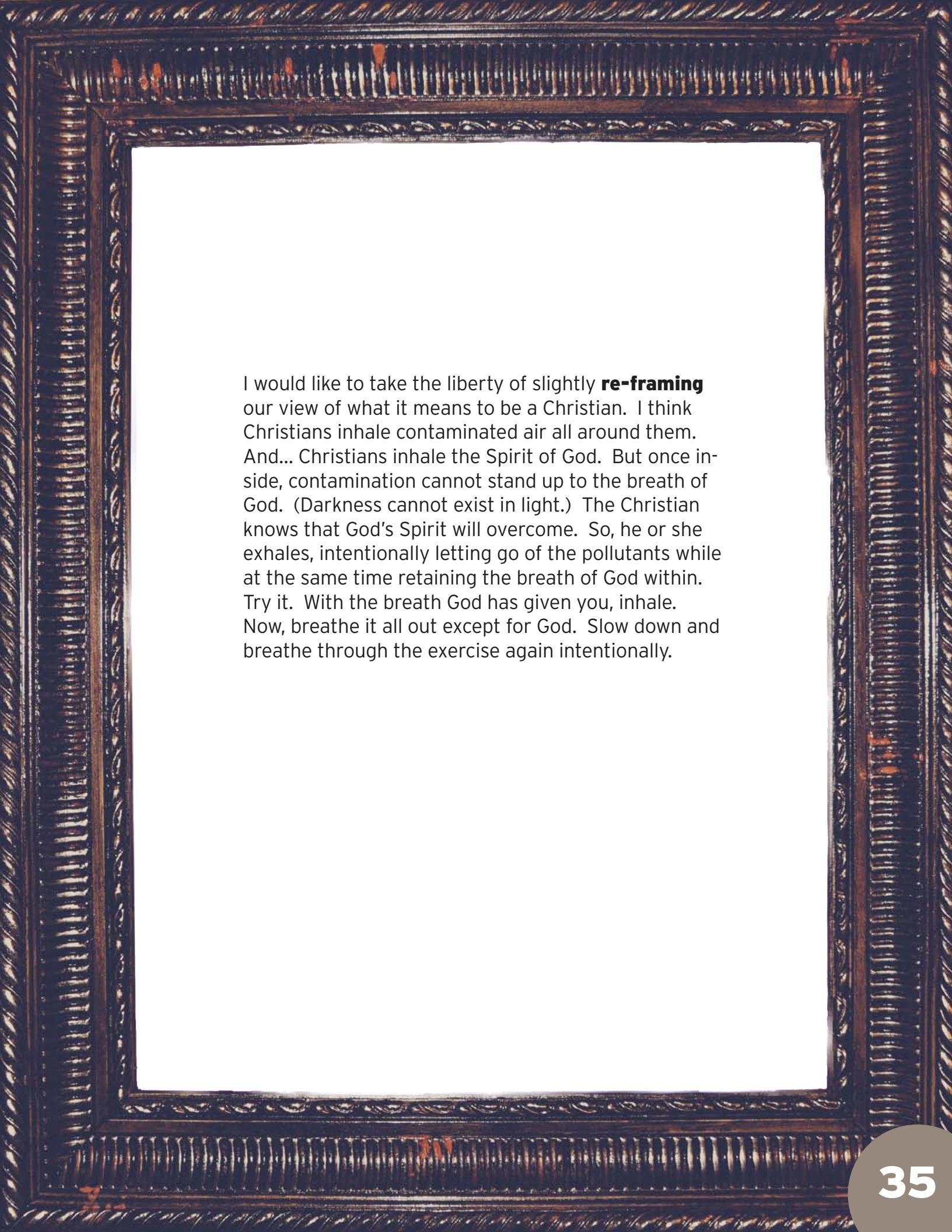
The truth is many of these systems are here to stay. We must learn to live in the tension. For example, I am not confident we can live without technology. Some well-intended folks give it a try by living within a 19th century environment. But, why are the technological innovations before the 19th century acceptable while those that happened after, not acceptable? The wagon, the hammer, the wheel... these are all byproducts of technology, are they not? How can you ever truly decide what is in and what is out? I think it is impossible to live without technology. But, there is a difference between being aware of technology's pitfalls and worshipping technology. Ultimately, all of us breathe the same air. The question becomes are we intentionally being changed from the inside? Or are we letting the air we breathe contaminate us?




Breathing has some important implications for us. It is interesting that in the Hebrew (as well as many other world languages) the word for “breath” is the same as “Spirit.” There is a long history between God’s name and breathing. When Moses was visited by God at the burning bush, among other things Moses asked, “Who should I say is sending me? What is your name?”

There is not a perfect way to translate God’s response in English. The closest we can get to it is, “L-O-R-D”. In Hebrew, the letters are YHWH. Often pronounced, Yahweh. Hebrew, like many ancient languages had no vowels. The flow of the consonants served to help shape the vowel sounds. But, if you attempt to pronounce the name phonetically without any vowels it winds up sounding like breathing. Try it... Y,W,H,W.

Let’s take this breathing thing a step further. Breathing consists of inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide. Exhaling is your body’s way of eliminating the poison from your system. Without exhaling the poison would eventually invite death.



I would like to take the liberty of slightly **re-framing** our view of what it means to be a Christian. I think Christians inhale contaminated air all around them. And... Christians inhale the Spirit of God. But once inside, contamination cannot stand up to the breath of God. (Darkness cannot exist in light.) The Christian knows that God's Spirit will overcome. So, he or she exhales, intentionally letting go of the pollutants while at the same time retaining the breath of God within. Try it. With the breath God has given you, inhale. Now, breathe it all out except for God. Slow down and breathe through the exercise again intentionally.



Because each of us struggle with our own pollutants and how they interact with unclean systems, intentionally exhaling is not always easy.

A man must exhale anxiety over an impending job decision in the middle of a system that says the only thing that matters is money.

A woman has to exhale the hurt around a word her friend uttered even though the system she lives in encourages her to hang on.

A parent is required to exhale control of the dreams they had for their child in spite of the fact that the system motivates them to do the opposite.

We inhale and we exhale... again and again and again, letting go of...

brokenness  
pride  
selfishness  
records of wrongs  
fear  
the worship of technology  
the unadulterated pursuit of capitalism  
projecting an image rather than pursuing truth  
conforming to the culture

Keep breathing. You were not made for culture assimilation. You were made to interact with an intimate, personal God. One as close as the breath that sustains you. One that will change the way you think from the inside out.

Don't fear. The tyrant has been defeated. Just keep breathing.

**This is how you live clean in a polluted world.**

1 This conclusion can be found in a variety of places like, Mary Ferrell Foundation, debate. [https://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/Kennedy-Nixon\\_Debates](https://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/Kennedy-Nixon_Debates).

2 Of course, technological innovations other than television influenced change but it lies beyond the scope of this book to detail the technological family tree and cultural pressure points that brought us to 1960.

3 Marshall McLuhan Website, <http://www.marshallmcluhan.com>

4 Genesis 47:7(NIV)

5 Genesis 47:25(NIV)

6 Walter Brueggemann, Truth Speaks to Power, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 17.

7 Brueggemann, 21.

8 Exodus 3:7-10 (NIV)

9 Brueggemann, 31.

10 This illustration was embellished out of some lines from Michael Paul Gallagher's "Dive Deeper: The Human Poetry of Faith"

11 Exodus 5 (NIV)

12 Jeremiah 4:4-7 (NIV)

13 Scott Daniels, 7 Deadly Spirits, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 20.

14 Jeremiah 4:14a (NIV)

15 Some of these are taken from Steve Wilkens' and Mark L. Sanford's book, "Hidden World-views".

16 Romans 12:2 (The Message)

17 Marshall McLuhan website, <http://www.marshallmcluhan.com/mcluhanisms>

18 GK Chesterton, The New Jerusalem, public domain

19 N.T. Wright, Surprised by Hope, (NY, NY: Harper One 2008), 75.

20 Colossians 1:20 (NIV)

21 Russian historians may have a different viewpoint.

## *About the Author*

Jonathan Foster is the lead-follower at Mission Church, a new faith community in Kansas City. You can access some of his blogs and podcasts at [missionchurchonline.com](http://missionchurchonline.com). He's done some undergraduate and postgraduate work although his favorite year of school was probably 2nd grade. (In 3rd grade teachers started asking him to divide decimals and it just went down hill from there.) He's married to Johnna and has three awesome children: Quincy, Shay and Evan.

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