

**Wharf and Bearings**

**VIII**

*Essays on  
Worldview and Culture*

Ralph C. Ennis

# **Wharf and Bearings VIII**

*Essays on  
Worldview and Culture*

Ralph C. Ennis

# Wharf and Bearings VIII

## *Worldview and Culture*

### Table of Contents

Introduction to WB Series .....	4
Understanding Worldview: Keys to 21 <sup>st</sup> Century People .....	6
Foundations of Culture .....	16
Culture-General Human Nature .....	19
Assessing Cultural Health .....	21
Key Ideas for Intercultural Relations .....	23
Toward Understanding the USA Cultural Context.....	25
Intercultural Decision Making.....	26
Resources to Explore .....	29
About the Authors.....	30

## Introduction to WB Series

As land dwelling beings, when we are at sea, two thoughts are always in mind—even if in the back of our minds. Where's the wharf—a safe place to dock? What's my bearing—which direction am I going and will it in time get me to a safe wharf?

We all need safe places. Fundamentally, life is filled with uncertainties. Sometimes we feel in control or at minimal risk of danger, but that is always only temporary. Our common human experience inevitably involves risks of the unknown. And through death, not to be feared, we journey to an eternal wharf in Jesus.

We all need a bearing that will get us where we want to go while preserving the ability to plot a course to a safe place. We can play far from this wharf, but we desire home.

Wharf and Bearings Series, a collection of essays, poems and a short story, is intended to present a journey—my journey. I share it with the hope that it will give some guidance as you seek your bearings and wharf throughout your life.

At no time are these essays to be considered exhaustive, they are pathways I have taken to find wharf and bearings for me. And collectively, they represent “philosophical peace” for me.



I dedicate this series to my wife of 40 years (in 2013), our four children and their spouses and our 13+ grandchildren and the generations to follow! Here's an overview of the series:

**Wharf and Bearings ONE:**  
*Hope and Beholding the Triune God*

**Wharf and Bearings TWO:**  
*Spirituality and the Triune God*

**Wharf and Bearings THREE:**  
*Knowing, Beauty, Ethics and Reality*

**Wharf and Bearings FOUR:**  
*Love, Longings, Success and Consequences*

**Wharf and Bearings FIVE:**  
*Poems from the Soul*

**Wharf and Bearing SIX:**  
*Oneness in Marriage*

**Wharf and Bearings SEVEN:**  
*The Mind, Decisions and Artificial Intelligence*

**Wharf and Bearing EIGHT:**  
*World View and Culture*

**Wharf and Bearing NINE:**  
*Gospel Implications*

**Wharf and Bearing TEN:**  
*Our Times and Futures*

*"... we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power,  
and the wonders He has done ..."  
Psalm 78:4 -6*

# Understanding Worldview: Keys to 21<sup>st</sup> Century People

By Ralph Ennis with Paula Rinehart

Twenty-first century ministry is going to look very different from ministry of the past. The world in which we are ministering has changed in vast and fundamental ways, and those changes are taking place at more than an intellectual level. They're happening on the deepest level possible: within the average person's worldview. These changes of perspective will require current ministry strategies to be reshaped in profound, even startling ways

Perhaps the best way to understand modern worldview is to return to the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Consider the following descriptions of the show's major characters. Their attitudes and outlook mirror internal ideals we see and hear every day.

## Consider the cast of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

*Jean-Luc Picard*: The adventurous Frenchman and impeccable leader of the starship *Enterprise* embodies the "No Fear" campaign among youth today.

*Deanna Troi*: Her telepathic mind and psychological insight shape the basis for much of the meaningful human interaction on the *Enterprise*. She represents the cutting edge of the New Age human potential movement.

*Data*: He challenges the essence of what it means to be human by presenting a noble alternative—the humanoid information-processor without a computer chip to create emotion.

*Worf*: The ancient, noble warrior has found his place in space. Surely many men would be proud to beat some drums with him.

*Geordi La Forge*: This engineering genius lives with a permanent disability of corrected blindness. He represents the hope that technology will deliver us from our infirmities and bring out our true genius.

The *Enterprise* glides through time in a world of illusion and virtual reality where consequences are ultimately meaningless. No transcendent set of values or morals guides decisions across cultures. Many god-like beings may exist; there is, however, no God of the Universe. Pluralism reigns.

Obviously, *Star Trek* is only a picture of where our culture is heading. Today's average person, especially someone under age 30, carries a mental and emotional perspective that more closely resembles Deanna Troi's or Jean-Luc Picard's than the worldview that Scripture describes. How do we exhort someone to respect human life when daily he can battle and kill in the realm of virtual reality with no fear of consequences—or enjoy the vicarious thrill of watching movie stars kill in Technicolor? How do we communicate the absolutes of sexual morality to people who see sexual pleasure as an inalienable right? What about sin and guilt and shame and salvation? How do we talk about the incarnate Christ who invaded space and time, a transcendent God who always was and always will be?

Unfortunately, in this age of deception and rapid change, the world is moving closer to a *Star Trek* view of human society and further from a biblical perspective.

How do we as Christians get a handle on the world around us in order to address the current movements of society and present a relevant and biblical Gospel? Being able to ride the winds of change, so as to speak Christ's truth and love well in this day, depends upon our willingness to stop and reassess what's happening around us. How has the cultural ground shifted beneath us? A broader and deeper perspective is the first step toward understanding the hearts and minds of people who have no idea how an intimate submission to Jesus Christ could be the absolute essence of all they have longed for in life.

Imagine climbing to the top of a baseball stadium where you can see the whole field from the top of the stands. How has the "ball field" upon which we do ministry changed? What do those changes mean in terms of the average person's worldview? Here are some possibilities.

### *The World Stage: Unity and Diversity*

The world is getting smaller and more unified. For example:

- We live in economic interdependence based on a common philosophy of free markets and global transportation systems that relocate people and goods.
- We enjoy nearly instant access to free and over-abundant information. The Internet is helping to combine the business world, collegiate world, and the intelligentsia into a worldwide culture.
- English is becoming the language of the world. It is the language of the Internet. Unity requires understanding; a common language promotes understanding. Computers are also making multiple-language acquisition less relevant. For example, one can write in English and have the readers receive the message in Spanish or another language via computer translation.
- Conventional barriers of transportation, territorial borders, and ethnic diversity are eroding as the world becomes a giant "melting pot."

All of these forces, and more, are helping to solidify a worldwide human culture with the intelligentsia and technical/business community leading the way. Yet amidst this unifying agenda, the need to establish a unique identity (both individually and corporately) is growing with equal intensity. The more we seem alike, the more important it becomes to establish that we are different. I am not you and you are not me, no matter how much the world's cohesive forces bring us together.

The need for uniqueness within unity operates on a national and cultural level as well. For example, France may be part of the European Commonwealth, but the French want to preserve those things that make them quintessentially French.

*Implication:* Unity in the world originally led to the tower of Babel. Human achievement—and human deception—came together there in a massive scene of independence from God. The unity emerging across modern cultures is based on the same abilities and the same frailties.

In a Christian framework, the basis for unity is different. In the kingdom of God, each individual has a unique identity as a child of the living God. Our unity is found in our common identity as citizens of that kingdom. We are children and friends of the King of Kings, and His Holy Spirit lives within us.

### *The Insufficiency of Technology and Science*

Modern science has always held out an implicit promise. It purports to offer a longer, easier, and safer life while also delivering the keys to understanding the mysteries of the universe and unleashing the creativity of the human imagination. Such is no small claim. While modern science has often delivered on its promises, life is not necessarily easier and true security remains as elusive as ever. In the wake of the technological revolution, much of what it means to be truly human and living in submission to the Creator of the universe stands in jeopardy.

- Our world is not safer. Nuclear threat exists stronger than ever with the fragmentation of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and many other nuclear nations ambitions.
- Vaccine-resistant diseases and mutating viruses threaten major proportions of the global population.
- Food production is adequate to meet the needs of everyone on the planet, but power and greed prevent its distribution.
- Worldwide pollution, especially in the air and seas, is impacting the biosphere.

Modern science has ushered in the industrial age, the nuclear age, and the age of information. These waves of development have brought sweeping changes to human life. With each new advance, however, the potential for resulting chaos and revolution grows. We have not been able to “engineer” human beings who can maximize scientific breakthroughs without producing comparable growth in their potential for destructive power. Just one misguided employee could topple a stable company within a week of unwise investing in world markets. A few computer hackers accessing military computer networks could cause enormous damage.

The more security and invulnerability we try to create, the more fragile life on the planet becomes. Scientific answers, at least for the thinking person, no longer seem like enough. Faith in the ability of modern science to deliver in any ultimate sense has truly become illusion.

The expanding possibility of genetic manipulation places science in the role of society’s savior. The death sentence handed to the human race can at least be postponed. Even the genes for old age can be singled out and altered. The possibility for sexual pre-disposition can be isolated in the womb. As the scientific knowledge base grows we start believing we can control our own destiny.

*Implications:* The psychological fallout of modern science, with all its technological and medical advances, has been enormous. Despite all its advances, science and technology have neither addressed nor altered the problems of the soul. Neither can touch what Jesus Christ did: pay the ultimate penalty for human sin.

Science and technology, while masquerading as modern society’s “savior,” have only brought us closer to the edge of our own destruction. In their wake, modern man senses the fragility of his life—and the deception that some new scientific breakthrough will save him in the end.



### *The Lack of Any Truly Viable Political/Economic System*

In 1996, *U.S. News and World Report* summarized the economic turmoil that envelopes the post-Communist era and where that instability may lead. “The big story of the last years of the 20th century,” its authors wrote, “is how free markets conquered all comers from the most brutish totalitarians to the most earnest regulators. Perhaps the biggest challenge of the first years of the 21st century will be making sure that the blessings of money—the freedoms it allows, the achievement it nourishes, the sense of stewardship it inspires—don’t turn into darker forces that shrivel humanity.”

“Darker forces that shrivel humanity.” What are these destructive forces? For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two political and economic systems have offered varying degrees of hope as potential means for organizing resources and distributing goods and capital. Capitalism and communism, respectively, have vied for the political and economic souls of whole nations. Now both have their own possibilities for destruction and chaos.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the moral and intellectual dry rot of communism has been exposed as never before. The former Soviet Union offers a giant object lesson on communism’s inability to foster justice and equality of opportunity. After 70 years of effort and brutal force, communism has not been able to move past an ideology of power. A select few still control the destiny of the many, with no real means of redress available. The average person emerges under communism with a carefully circumscribed existence and an economic standard decades behind comparable cohorts. The pipe dream of communism, as an intellectual and social alternative, appears more bankrupt than ever before.

Capitalism and democracy, when implemented without a Judeo-Christian foundation, fare little better as philosophical and political systems. Human greed has an amazing ability to steal the day. As western democracies stray from their moral roots, boundaries on the darker aspects of the human spirit disappear. Wealth and opportunity are still funneled into the hands of a few.

*Implication:* The spread of the Gospel has never been dependent on a particular form of government or economy. Now as the world grapples with the exposed weaknesses of the two major economic systems—communism and capitalism—the Christian community must be prepared to offer a viable alternative based on Jesus’ view of humanity and the use of wealth.

The American hope of returning to the “Christian” foundations of our nation must be radically challenged. How Christian are the foundations which stand on slavery, justified by greed and people sold for their labor? How Christian are the foundations which allowed near-genocide of native American Indians? Our foundations may indeed be deist in nature--but insisting that America’s roots are Christian masks the true nature of spiritual warfare on our soil and robs us of opportunities for true repentance and spiritual transformation.

### *The Erosion of True Meaning*

For Baby Boomers the quest for significance is preeminent. For the Generation X and Y, searching for significance seems like futility. “Why reach out for significant impact when in my heart of hearts I can’t find any meaning for life?” Boomers grew up in a day when it was assumed

that life had meaning—they just weren't sure what it was. Therefore, they could move out into their world and search for significant impact. Gen X and Y look at the world around them and see no meaning and are compelled to look back to their grandparents and great-grandparents' world in search of meaning. None of this gives the appearance of searching for significance, but rather can look like apathy. Recently, when asked by a reporter, "What is the meaning of life?", a student who achieved a perfect score on the SAT replied she had no idea!

There are four ways in which we are experiencing an erosion of meaning: relativism, and radical redefinitions of beauty, time, and reality.

**Relativism.** Relativism is a philosophy that rejects absolute truth. "Right" and "wrong" are individually determined, subjective categories of thought. Morality lacks any objective basis, and truth claims are unacceptable.

**Redefining Beauty.** Beauty has always been associated with the pristine quality of nature that exalts purity and all that is lovely to behold or intrinsically possess. Beauty, in many ways, is a characteristic of holiness. Hence, the Psalmist speaks of worshipping God in the beauty of His holiness (Psalm 29:2). Even if the ideal of beauty cannot be reached, its meaning has always been clear.

"Emotional honesty" is slowly replacing goodness as an ideal for beauty. In other words, it is the full revelation and expression of human emotion and behavior, with nothing held back, that is deemed beautiful. What might have been known as sordid, even evil, qualifies as beauty because it is "emotionally honest." Whatever is real is worthy, and no less beautiful than what would always have fit the description.

**Redefining Time.** The nature of time is currently changing definitions. A biblical view of time embraces non-repeatable, linear time with clear boundaries for the human soul and the universe. "It is appointed to a man once to die and then the judgment," Hebrews 9:27 says. Only God is not bound by time constraints. His creation, however, knows one life span. This life, as the saying goes, is not a dress rehearsal, and there are no reruns or repeat performances.

The very nature and boundaries of time are now being challenged. In science and the arts, time is often presented as repeatable and allowing for multiple paths that often occur simultaneously. The logical result is a stripping of the relationship between cause and effect. Time is fluid; the past bleeds into the future and the present impinges on the past. And nothing means anything--except, of course, whatever you want it to mean in that moment.

**Redefining Reality.** The last factor in the erosion of meaning is the redefining of reality. In the past, only philosophers quibbled over the notion of reality. What was real was what existed in time and space and could be observed, quantified, or otherwise apprehended.

Now the definition of reality is giving way to an insubstantial, "virtual" reality. The use of "virtual reality" as a 3-D phenomenon in which all the senses are excited but consequences are unconnected with choices has begun to shape our notions of reality itself.

If a person doesn't know what's "real," then nothing matters. It's impossible to do something senseless because no reality can be deemed as making objective sense. Any basis for truth is gone. In its void, chaos has begun to reign.

Here quantum physics helps support the redefining of reality. If we are “waves and particles,” theoretically we can exist in more than one location simultaneously. Can we connect our consciousnesses in our multiple realities and thus achieve true integration of our whole selves? While this may sound like nonsense to those older than 30, the emotional and conceptual foundational stones are in place for the younger generation to be lost in this sea.

*Implications:* Life without meaning is not simply impractical, or even unsafe or unwise. It leads to chaos and anarchy. But man cannot live without meaning, so he will continue to search for it. The 21st-century church must reclaim this ground. Otherwise there will be no intellectual or emotional pegs on which to hang the Gospel: God in human form, invading space and time in the person of Jesus Christ—the embodiment of holiness and truth. Reality is more than this physical world. All the reality of heaven comes into play as we find the meanings put forth in Scripture.

### *Chaos at the Core*

As we move deeper into the 21st century, we face the future with no clear model for humanness. Modern man has seen a succession of options, each limited and incomplete. The Renaissance man, whose god was reason and intellect, gave way to the Industrial man. But man enabled by machine all too easily became man-as-machine. Man’s essential humanness and dignity have lacked sufficient philosophical underpinnings. Now as we come to the close of the century, what is left is the Fragmented man, in search of some transcendent identity that can render him whole and integrated.

At stake is man’s sense of identity as a human being. The central question revolves around finding a truly adequate answer for the question, “Who or what am I?” In that search, and the chaos that comes with fragmented pieces, modern man is moving toward the fusion of worship and sex as the ultimate expression of his being. It has long been noted that human beings must have something to worship. The unity of worship and sex (known as “sacred sexuality” in New Age literature) presents an alluring way to integrate body and soul.

Hollywood is certainly supporting this notion. The movies *Michael* and *The Preacher’s Wife* both portray male angels who fall in love with women. These angels are definitely more attractive than most of the available male population. The convoluted effect is to make immorality virtuous. In the future, as R-rated versions of these movies are made, we may see what amounts to temple orgy prostitution within the context of worshipping goddesses. The foundational stones are clearly there. Without the Creator, the combination of worship and sex will only lead to further chaos at man’s core.

*Implications:* To reach the coming culture, Christians will have to reclaim the spiritual implications of the sexual relationship, especially as it relates to the essence of being male or female. The beauty, passion, and spirituality of sex as portrayed in the imagery of the Song of Solomon, coupled with the sanctity of marriage, will be a necessary apologetic in the face of “sacred sexuality.” As the world searches for the “integrated person,” we know the key: Jesus Christ the Bridegroom! But we’re a long way from experiencing the depths of this union and communicating its essence among ourselves and to the unbelieving world.

### At the Turn of the Century

This is a unique time in history, full of possibilities for the Church. Our society stands poised at the threshold of the century with hope and yearning for the future. We also face the prospect of destruction and brutality on ever-larger scales. Unity, diversity, hope, disillusionment, meaning, time, beauty, reality, capitalism, democracy, identity, spiritual sexuality—these are major categories with few reliable guides to make the road through life more clear.

Such turbulent philosophical undercurrents have come together to make this era the Age of Deception. *We are experiencing the loss of perception of true reality.* As a society we have lost our moorings. As individuals we have been cut adrift. The observable symptoms, on an individual level, are deep personal loneliness and a continued loss of meaning or the belief that anything really matters.

Christianity, at least in its public form, is perceived as largely irrelevant. Most of our theological thinking is moored in the Reformation. Our structures still resemble the church in an agrarian culture. Christianity is caricatured by some as a hate group that deserves to be excluded from the new social identity.

The ray of hope is Christ Himself. He holds the keys to heaven. He is the Lord of history and His purposes will prevail.

### Toward a Viable Biblical World View

Every society has a basic worldview, which is simply a lens from which to interpret perceived reality. Understanding and influencing that worldview is crucial to being able to present the good news of Christ in a way that can be heard. Failure to address the hearer's viewpoint will be perceived as insensitive, rude, or just vastly irrelevant. Understanding worldview will also help us identify the pressure points of a society in which individuals are most open to the Gospel.

As we turn the century, the body of Christ needs a biblical worldview that speaks to the questions being asked today by the pop culture and philosophers among us.

Unfortunately, in this age of deception and rapid change, the world is moving closer to a *Star Trek* view of human society and away from a biblical foundation. The youth culture, especially, is beginning to emotionally embrace elements of a worldview that are outrageously unbiblical. The synthetic mixture of ancient Greece and Babylonia (combining worship and sexuality) with Eastern thought and North American Indian spiritism, seemingly authenticated by modern physics and believable computer technology has led us down a path that is worlds away from the one we know as Christians.

Our Christian worldview was shaped in the cultural milieu and the intellectual climate that existed during the period that fostered the Protestant Reformation. The questions being asked in our day are far different. The conceptual categories are being pushed back much further...and yet, they are never outside the reach of Scripture. The Gospel will come forth in luminous splendor for the present and the coming generations, if we dare to let ourselves wrestle with the questions being asked at this point in time and the assumptions being challenged.

### Three Levels of Society

To really appreciate the significance of the questions we must raise in order to formulate a viable biblical worldview for our age, it is important to understand the overall picture of human society. Only then can we see these questions for what they are: the DNA of culture that determines the whole panoply of human choice and meaning.

Society essentially exists on three levels, as the chart entitled “Understanding People in Society” illustrates. The first, and most obvious, level is that we call the institutional level. When you arrive in a new country, you see reminders of its institutions. Banking, transportation, housing, commerce—these are the societal institutions you connect with almost immediately. It takes many institutions to make up a society. Society on an institutional level is like a house above ground. It is obvious for all to see, so it’s easy to make the mistake of considering this element of life the most important.

The second level at which we understand society deals with human diversity. Another way to say that is that our diversity is based on the cultural identities to which we are loyal. Just as the basement of a house exists below the observable superstructure, so cultural identities often lie below the surface of a society. As a basement supports a house, so do our cultural identities support and shape our society’s institutions.

The third level of society, and the most difficult to understand, exists on a conceptual and emotional reasoning plane. It is illustrated as the bedrock on which the house is built.

In a fundamental sense, all societies deal with basically the same questions. How an individual—and a society—addresses these questions will determine the worldview from which they operate. Their sensitivity to these categories will determine how the Gospel is best presented to their particular mindset. While this level of society is not easily discerned, it is nonetheless determinative. Everything visible is built upon the foundation of worldview.

### Conceptual Categories that Determine Worldview

The basic elements of worldview include addressing the following categories in some significant way. Below is an attempt to generate these basic questions. These are not simply conceptual categories. Each of us attaches emotional reasoning to each of these categories; even if we can’t articulate our position, we know when it is being affronted or violated.

- **Questions of Reality**
  - Is what we experience real or an illusion?
  - Does what we experience exist, or is it nonexistent?
  - What is the nature of consciousness?
  - How real are dreams?
  
- **Foundations of Reality**
  - What is the nature of matter?
  - What is the nature of energy?
  - What is the nature of time and movement?
  - What is the nature of space?
  - What is the nature of cause and effect?

- **Authorities of Reality**
  - What are meaningful meanings?
  - What is the meaning of life, work, sex, wealth, etc.?
  - What is truth and honesty?
  - What is language and communication?
  - What is beauty? What is intelligence and emotion?
  - What is power and weakness?
  - What are the foundational pegs of decision-making?
  
- **Relational Realities**
  - Does God exist? Who is God?
  - What is the nature of humankind?
  - What is the nature of interpersonal relationships?
  - Do spirit-beings exist?
  - Who (or what) are the spirit-beings?
  - What is the nature of other life (animal, plant, etc.)?
  - How are the young cared for and assimilated into society?
  
- **Dilemmas of Reality**
  - What is good and evil? Why is there good and evil?
  - What are sin, shame, and guilt vs. moral wholesomeness, peace, and joy?
  - What is pain and pleasure?
  - Why is there pain and pleasure?
  - What is the nature of judgment and mercy?
  - What is the nature of life and death?
  
- **Dependencies in Reality**
  - What are basic human needs? What is love?
  - How are the needs for security, significance, and strength to be met?
  - How will material wealth be managed in a world of need, greed, and beauty?
  - What is the desired human identity?

### **Looking to the Future**

In all this discussion we could make a fatal mistake. We could assume that all Christians need to do is point out the deficiencies of other worldviews. Critique is necessary, but it could be fatally hypocritical. We must be bold enough to see what the non-Christian world is telling us Christians. It has seen our fragmentation, our loss of meaning, our lack of love, our irrelevance to the modern world and placed us at best in the corner—at worst as a hate group which needs to be purged. A non-Christian can sense when a person is as fragmented as he is, and let's face it—most evangelical Christians are experiencing a significant degree of personal fragmentation.

*Our task is to formulate a truly workable, livable biblical worldview for our times and to live it out in each 24-hour day in every institution of our global society. No small task. But we have no small God! He wins—He has won, He is winning, He will win—and we are His children, His friends and His bride!*

**Your Thought:**

What are the basic tenants of your worldview?

*Written in 1997*

# Foundations of Culture

The intent of this essay is to provide a framework by which to consider the array of cultures around the planet—and subcultures. This will be a brush stroke rather than an exhaustive work. And the hope is that those who read will explore various cultures throughout their lives with appreciation and understand of their foundations. What follows is a series of question from which one can explore a specific culture.

## **Where do we begin as we think about this culture?**

1. What past events affect the people?
2. What realities do the people face today?

## **How do today's people process life?**

3. What are the longings of the people?
4. How do the people view themselves?
5. How do the people view the meaning of life
6. How do people experience spirituality?
7. How do the people work and play?
8. How do the people learn?
9. How do the people communicate and resolve conflict?
10. How do the genders relate?
11. How do families and in-groups relate?
12. How do the people make decisions?

## **How do the people relate to God, organizations and outsiders?**

13. Why do the people respond positively to the triune God?
14. How do the people view organization (e.g. Business, government, religion, community)?
15. How do the people view foreigners?
16. How might Americans relate across ethnicities?

## **What can we learn from the people?**

17. How does an understanding of this culture influence the way we relate to them?

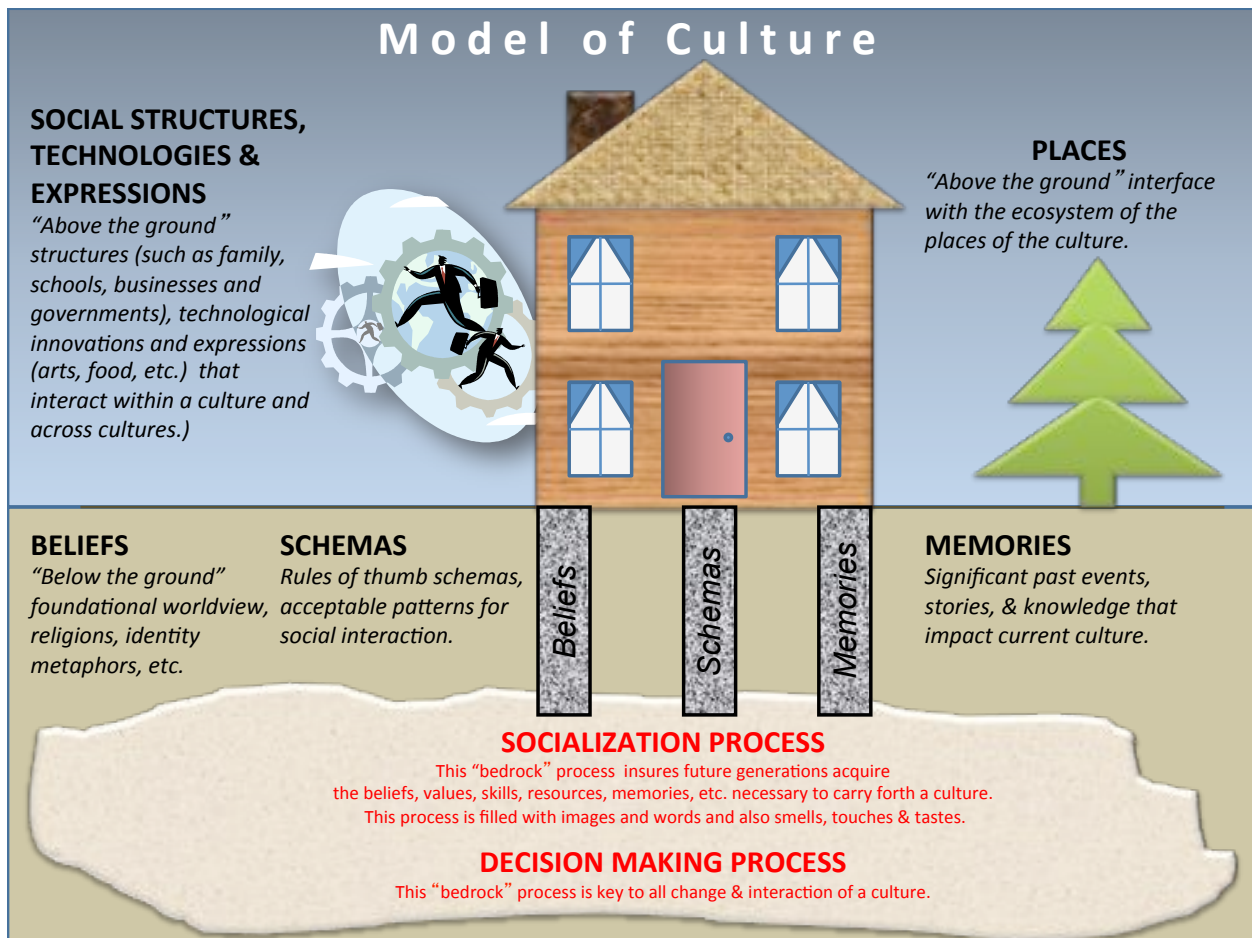
Each of the above questions needs to be addressed from the perspective of central tendencies rather than stereotyping. It is much easier to stereotype a culture—to describe all their members as having a few defining traits. But rarely if ever is that the case—except maybe for some physical trait. A more accurate way of addressing these questions is to seek descriptions for 60-70% of the people within that culture. Even then such generalizations may be difficult to achieve.

Another way to approach the foundations of culture is in the below diagram. A culture is like a house built on foundations below and encased in its environment. The broader national or global society impacts each culture. Within that global context institutions and technologies and social interactions continuously influence the future emergence of a present culture.



Below the line of sight worldviews and social schemas are at work within the culture's historical context. These ways of thinking and acting are powerful and often subtle reminders of who we are as members of a culture.

The bedrock of culture is to be found in its socialization process and decision making process. Socialization provides the members for acculturating new members of the culture—often the young as they grow to adulthood. This socialization occurs in schools, through media and friends and in families. Seemingly hotwired into our genes is an allegorical foreshadowing process of socialization. The roles of parent-child foreshadow the roles of marriage and penetrate the roles of worshipper and the worshipped.



All cultures survive and seek to thrive through the decisions of their members. This often hidden reality is the foundational process of all cultures. And cultures form decision making preferences. They form habits of deciding that support their previous decisions and further solidify the defining aspects of their culture.

Obviously the questions and house metaphor is not to diminish the beauty, significance and importance of the diversity of the world's cultures. Each life and each culture has significant life events that help mold their thinking and decision making. Economic depression, war, natural disasters, political events, child abuse, early death of a parent, etc. all impact our reason, emotions and behavior.

The probabilistic cause and effect feedback loop of pain and pleasure in the short and long term is a cementing stamp in culture. The “where were you when” cultural conscious imprints our decision making.

In our emerging global context, the need to better understand cultures is evident. If we are to relate well across cultures, we must have good means of understanding them while holding in tension our own cultural bias.

**Your Thoughts:**

How would you describe your culture?

*Written in 2008*

## Culture-General Human Nature

What is a human being? What is his or her nature? Below is a listing of some of the basic central tendencies of human nature that are culture-general. This is not meant to be exhaustive, simply partially descriptive.

<b>Toward a Basic Human Nature Model</b>
We are <b>sensory</b> beings. We sense on a pleasure-pain continuum. We eschew boredom and pain and seek excitement and pleasure with various degrees of control and stresses.
We are <b>rational</b> beings. We are solution seekers: seeking accurate descriptions and integrative meanings of experience.
We are <b>emotional</b> beings. We internally feel and interpret our environment. We embrace, respect and liberate each other to varying degrees.
We are <b>willful</b> beings. We make decisions. Those decisions are based on our logic of intellect and logic of emotions.
We are <b>behavioral</b> beings. We act out our decisions.
We are <b>relational</b> beings. We seek attachments and survive through them. We are social beings.
We are <b>communicative</b> beings. We communicate linguistically and visual.
We are <b>motivational</b> beings. We are genetically motivated to express our nature over time and space. This weighted internal direction provides the impetus for real time-space decision making.
We are <b>creative</b> beings. We are imaginative.
We are <b>moral/immoral</b> beings. We perceive good and evil and through pride, guilt and shame.
We are <b>existent</b> beings. We are <b>self-aware</b> . We exist in real time and space.
We are <b>power</b> seeking beings. We seek power (sexual, economic, political, etc.) to survive and thrive.
We are <b>spiritual</b> beings. We perceive that there is more intelligence in the universe than exists in the animal kingdom and we tend to worship something (God, gods, nature, angels, etc.).
We are <b>finite physical</b> beings. We exist in limited space containers and interact with our environments.
We are <b>bonded</b> beings. We form attachments with others that are protective, adaptive and symbolic in nature. We are initially bonded to our biological mothers and often fathers.
We are <b>sexual-passion</b> beings. We are <b>reproductive</b> beings. We culturally ascribe gender roles to distinguish genetic differences. We experience sexually with deep passion.
We are hierarchical <b>identity</b> “bounded” beings and we structure our identity primarily around our spiritual self, sexual self, economic self and relational self.
We seek <b>glory</b> , recognition, attention, and respect.
We are <b>conscious</b> beings. Our states of consciousness impact our perception of reality.
We are <b>integrative-memory-meanings</b> beings. We construct means by organizing our perceptions and recalling these memories as we adapt to life.
We are <b>changeable</b> beings. We grow, mature, and decay.
We are <b>dependent</b> and <b>exhaustible</b> beings. We require food, air, space and sleep. We die.
We are <b>time-oriented</b> beings. We perceive past, present and future.
We are innately <b>brutal</b> and <b>tamable</b> .
We are <b>survivalists</b> . We have fight, flight and adapt defense mechanisms.

We are <b>love seeking</b> beings capable of giving and receiving limited love and affection.
We are <b>goal striving</b> beings. Our goals often include survival, thriving and glory. Inadequacy of goal satisfaction is common.
We are <b>feedback-oriented</b> beings. We respond and alter direction in accordance to social and environmental feedback.
We are <b>infinite believing</b> beings. We conceptualize past finite experience into infinite iterations and transcendence.
We are <b>mysterious</b> beings. We are “formula resistant” to our own limited capacities.

The above list of culture-general traits is meant to encourage us to appreciate the image of God within us and the complexity by which God has encased us in finite bodies. Amidst these commonalities of being human, we have all the diversity of individual personality and story and the complexity of cultural diversity and their histories.

**Your thoughts:**

What aspect of who you are most fascinates you?

*Written in 2000*

## Assessing Cultural Health

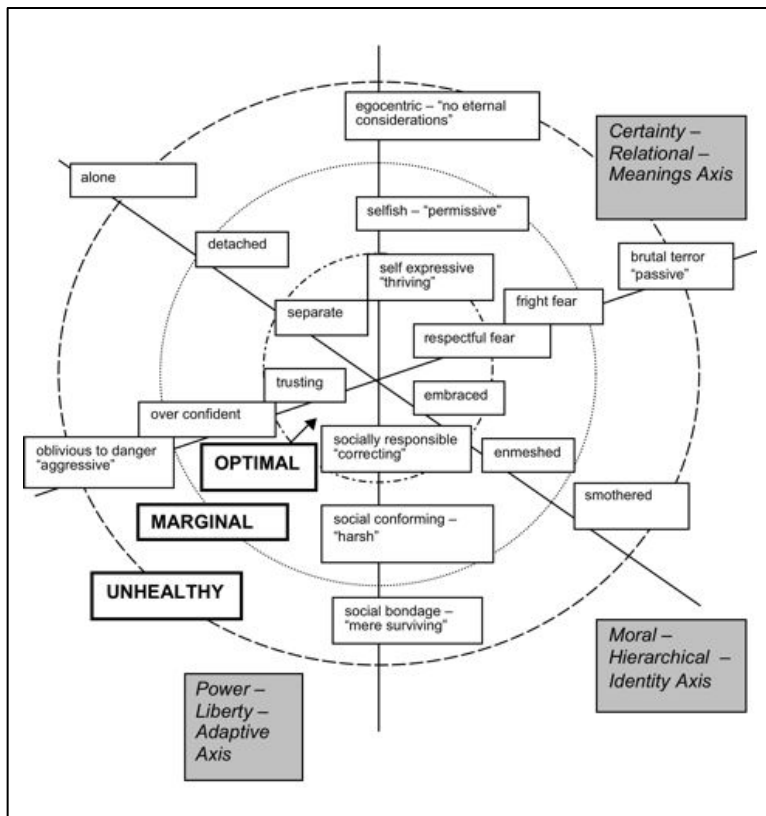
Psychological health models are common, but formulating a model of cultural health is very problematic. People are understandably hesitant to “judge” another culture as unhealthy, as inferior. Such judgments can be very destructive.

The below very confusing diagram seeks to point toward an environment for optimal, marginal and unhealthy cultural development. Obviously this grid appears value laden and judgmental. However without risking cultural judgments, we risk blindness to cultural trends that bred ethnic cleansing, global wars, etc.

The axes are an overlap of the logic of emotion, logic of intellect and imagined outcomes (decision making goals). This part of the model isn’t easily seen as culture-general. Still an emerging global culture invested in intercultural relations needs guidelines for health.

Definitions and boundaries of each word suffer from a deconstructionist view of meanings. However, I use them with central tendencies in mind. This is simply an attempt to engage in the dialogue. Note great diversity is inherent with both healthy and unhealthy cultures.

An unhealthy culture helps acculturate people who make decisions that enhance egocentric concerns, aggressive actions toward others and an alone sense of moral identity OR acculturate people who make decisions that enhance social bondage, smothered relationships and brutal terror.



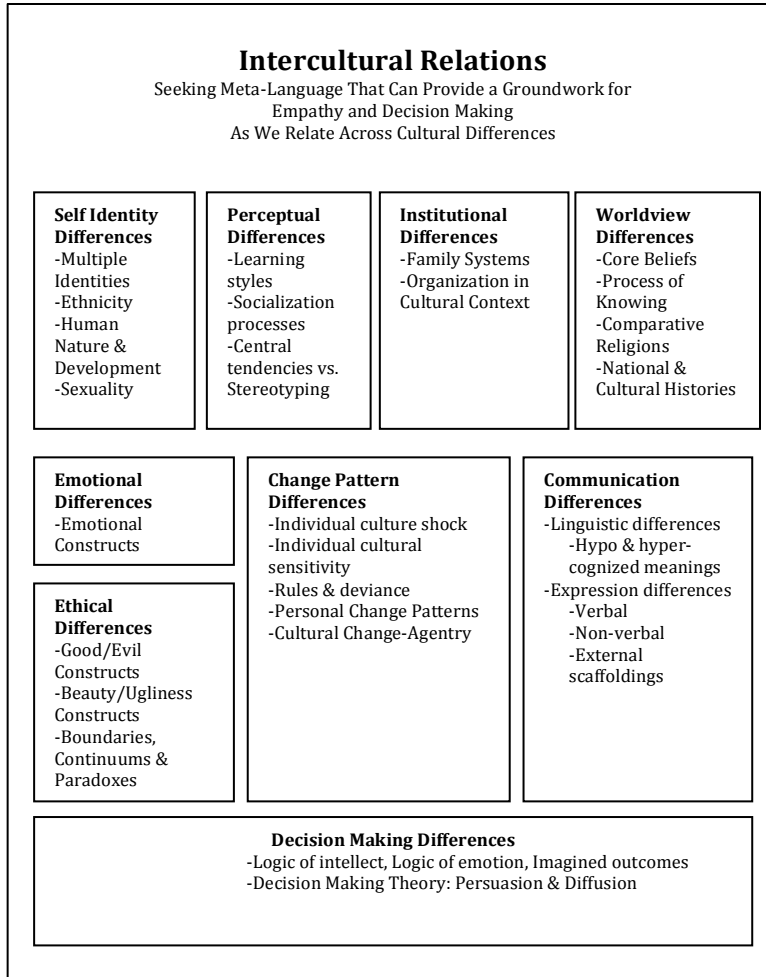
As we move toward a global culture, we need a means for conceptualizing this emergence. The human race began with a biological “Adam and Eve” who bore children and eventually an extended family. Somewhere in our human past this family diffused across the planet and formed distinct cultures while living within the boundaries of human nature.

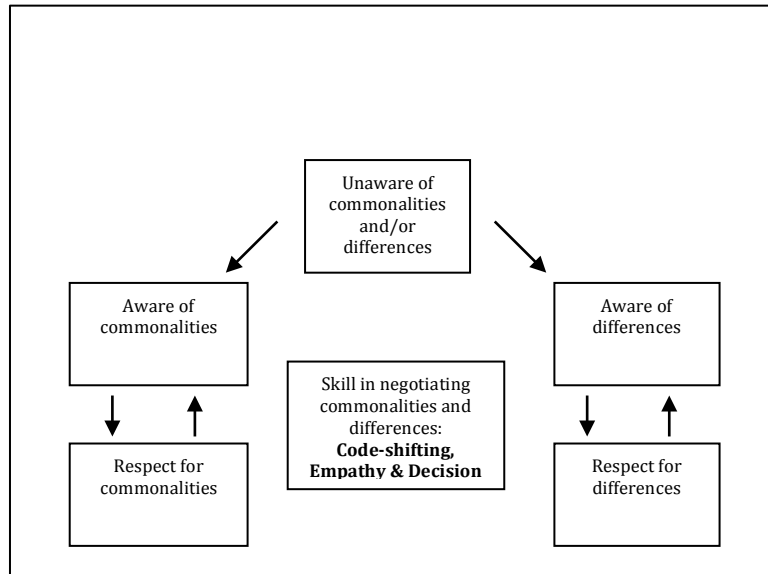
The emerging global culture is the reassembling of the family of cultures with each bringing their own distinctive and being represented unevenly within the whole family. About ninety percent of the world population can be accessed from about 15 cultures. In many parts of the world, the family dynamics of a family of fifteen would be easily perceivable. In order to perceive the intercultural dynamic of the emerging global cultural we need to view the emerging global culture as a functional/dysfunctional family of cultures with 15 or so primary cultures with each playing a somewhat stable but ever adapting role.

*Written in 2000*

# Key Ideas for Intercultural Relations

The below figures seek to depict the key concepts involved in intercultural relations and a developmental model for training people in the knowledge and skills necessary for harmonious intercultural relations.





These figures are given as pathways to pursuing harmony among cultures. We live in a day of significant cultural disharmony. We often do not value cultural differences—they threaten our way of doing this. We sometimes fail to see our great commonalities as human beings created in the image of God. And the story of God, He has allowed us much disagreement regarding Who He is and what He is about.

*February 2007 and updated July 2013*

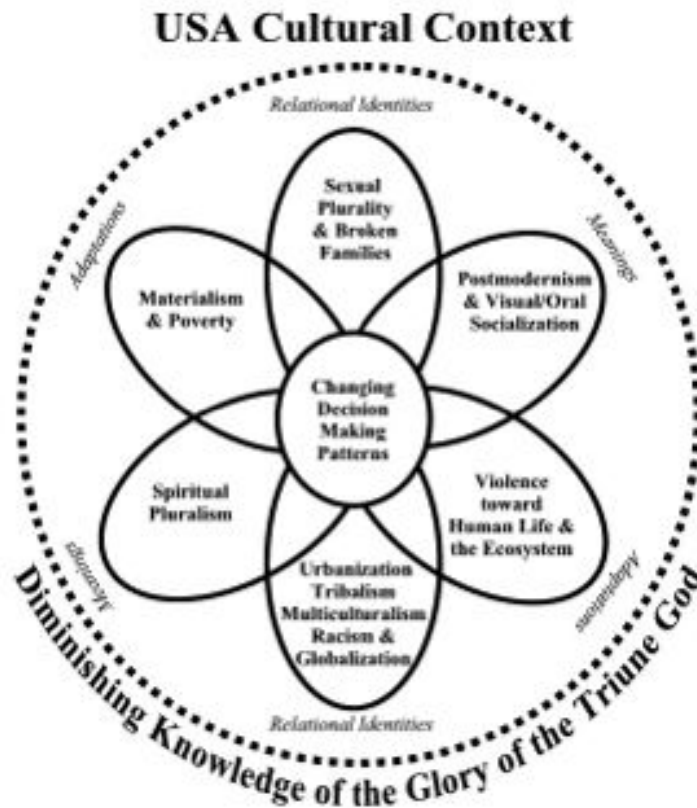


# Toward Understanding the USA Cultural Context

The USA cultural context is complex. We are a society with many cultures that have blended both immigrants and native Americans. We are a country with various generational differences within these cultural contexts that bridge ethnicities.

In the figure below a way of looking at the USA cultural context is offered. This figure is obviously not the only way to view the USA. It is offered as an attempt to give some conceptual handles to this multifaceted context.

At the center of our context is decision making. As we make new decisions we dynamically play out and change our culture.



Designed 2007

# Intercultural Decision Making\*

*\*This information is also included in Wharf and Bearing VII.*

Below is the reference for my brief article on intercultural decision making.

Ennis, Ralph (2004). "A Theoretical Model for Research in Intercultural Decision Making", *Intercultural Communication Studies, Volume XIII*, pp 113-124.

And the table of contents for my thesis as required for a Masters in Intercultural Relations is below:

## **TITLE: A Theoretical Model for Research in Intercultural Decision Making**

<b>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>6</b>
Methodology of Theory Construction	
Qualifying the ICDM Model	
Using Conceptual Space in Model Development	
Philosophical Assumptions of the ICDM Model	
Rationale for Constructing the ICDM Model	
<b>CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>15</b>
Decision Making Literature	
Expected Utility Model	
Constraints Model	
Expectancy-Value Theory	
Health Belief Model	
Prospect Theory	
Social Judgment Theory	
Self-Regulation Model	
Reciprocal Causal Models	
Interdependency and the Negation of Super-Logic	
Summary of Decision Making Literature	
Consumer Behavior Literature	
Engel-Kollat-Blackwell Model	
Howard-Sheth Model	
Nicosia Model	
Mullen and Johnson's General Model of Consumer Behavior	
Fishbein and Ajzen's Model of Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior	
Assael's Model of Complex Decision Making	
PAD Emotional-State Model	
ZMET Research Process	
Cultural Insights, Inc. Process	

Summary of Consumer Behavior Literature  
Intercultural Literature  
Anxiety/Uncertainty Management  
Violation of Expectancy Values  
Identity Negotiation Theory  
Cross-Cultural Adaptation  
Shared Meanings  
Systems Theory  
Hall's Low and High Context Communication  
Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity  
Erickson's Life Cycle Model  
Moral Development Models  
Learning Models  
Summary of Intercultural Literature  
A Composite of Factors from Literature

#### **CHAPTER 4. AN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT FOR DECISION MAKING**

**47**

Defining the Intercultural Context  
The Decision Maker(s)  
Primary Nature of Decision Making  
Overall Flow of Decision Making  
Inputs  
Interactive Decisions  
Internal Decisions  
Culturally motivated sensory perception decisions  
Self and others assessment decisions  
Belief integration decisions  
Emotional Integration Decisions  
Change Assessment Decisions  
Behavioral Communicative Decisions  
Outside Influence Factors  
Outcomes of Decisions  
Feedback from Outcomes of Decisions  
Cultural Change through Decision Making  
Importance of Intercultural Decision Making  
Chapter Summary

#### **CHAPTER 5. A MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL DECISION MAKING**

**89**

ICDM Model – A Process Model of Intercultural Decision Making  
Logic of Intellect  
Power Axis: A Continuum from Powerful to Powerless  
Morality Axis: A Continuum from Good to Evil  
Certainty Axis: A Continuum from Accuracy to Intuition  
Central Construct of Logic of Intellect: Space  
Logic of Emotion  
Liberty Axis: A Continuum from Freedom to Bonding  
Relational Axis: A Continuum from Trust to Fear

Hierarchical Axis: A Continuum from Honor to Shame  
Central Construct of Logic of Emotion: Jealousy  
Imagined Outcomes  
Adaptation Axis: A Continuum from Surviving to Thriving  
Identity Axis: A Continuum from Desired to Undesired Identity  
Meanings Axis: A Continuum from Meaningful to Meaningless  
Central Construct of Imagined Outcomes: Creative Harmony  
Minimal and High Stressed Decision Making  
An Intersecting Dynamic of Decision Making  
A Special Case: The Japanese Concept of Amae  
Scope of the ICDM Model  
A Predictive Model  
A Developmental Model  
Ideas for Future Research  
Chapter Summary

<b>CHAPTER 6. APPLICABILITY OF THE ICDM MODEL IN RESEARCH</b>	<b>137</b>
An Example: Chinese and American Intercultural Decision Making	
Logic of Intellect	
Logic of Emotion	
Imagined Outcomes	
Intersecting Concepts	
A Tentative Comparison of American and Chinese Decision Making	
Some Implications for American-Chinese Intercultural Relations	
Chapter Summary	

<b>REFERENCE LIST</b>	<b>160</b>
-----------------------	------------

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>168</b>
Research of American and Chinese Students	

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>172</b>
References from Decision Making Literature	
References from Consumer Behavior Literature	
References from Cultural and Intercultural Literature	
References regarding Chinese and Americans	

## Resources to Explore

### CONNECT BIBLE STUDIES

GOD: Connecting with His Outrageous Love  
IDENTITY: Becoming Who God Says I Am  
SOUL: Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions  
RELATIONSHIPS: Bringing Jesus into My World  
LIFE: Thriving a Complex World  
FREEDOM: Breaking the Power of Shame

### MINI-STUDIES

The New Me  
God: Can I Like Him  
Finding Mercy  
Relationships

### IMAGE SETS

Searching the Ordinary for Meanings

### BOOKS

The Shame Exchange:  
Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom  
Worth a Thousand Words:  
The Power of Images to Transform Hearts

### INVENTORIES

Breakthru: Discovering My Spiritual Gifts  
Breakthru: Discovering My Primary Roles  
Personal Image Profile

For the above and additional resources see:

[http://www.leadersandinfluencers.com/Store\\_P4UF.html](http://www.leadersandinfluencers.com/Store_P4UF.html)

## About the Authors

Ralph and Jennifer Ennis have served with The Navigators since 1975. They have ministered at Princeton University, Richmond Community, Glen Eyrie Leadership Development Institute, The CoMission in Russia, and in Raleigh, NC. In 2006 Jennifer co-founded JourneyMates, a ministry to help people grow in intimacy with the Triune God through Scripture, silence and solitude.

Unless otherwise noted, the essays of the WB Series have been written by Ralph. However, each work was crafted in the context our marriage relationship and with the editorial benefit of Jen's perspectives and unique abilities.

In 2013 Ralph and Jennifer celebrated 40 years of marriage. They have four married children and thirteen+ grandchildren.



Our web sites:

[www.leadersandinfluencers.com](http://www.leadersandinfluencers.com)  
[www.journeymates.org](http://www.journeymates.org)  
[www.ralphennis.com](http://www.ralphennis.com)

©2013 Ralph Ennis. All rights reserved. This material may not be reproduced in any format without written permission.

All Scripture quotations in this publication are taken from:

*The Holy Bible: New International Version (NIV)*, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society, all rights reserved.

*New American Standard Bible (NASB)*, ©The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, and 1977