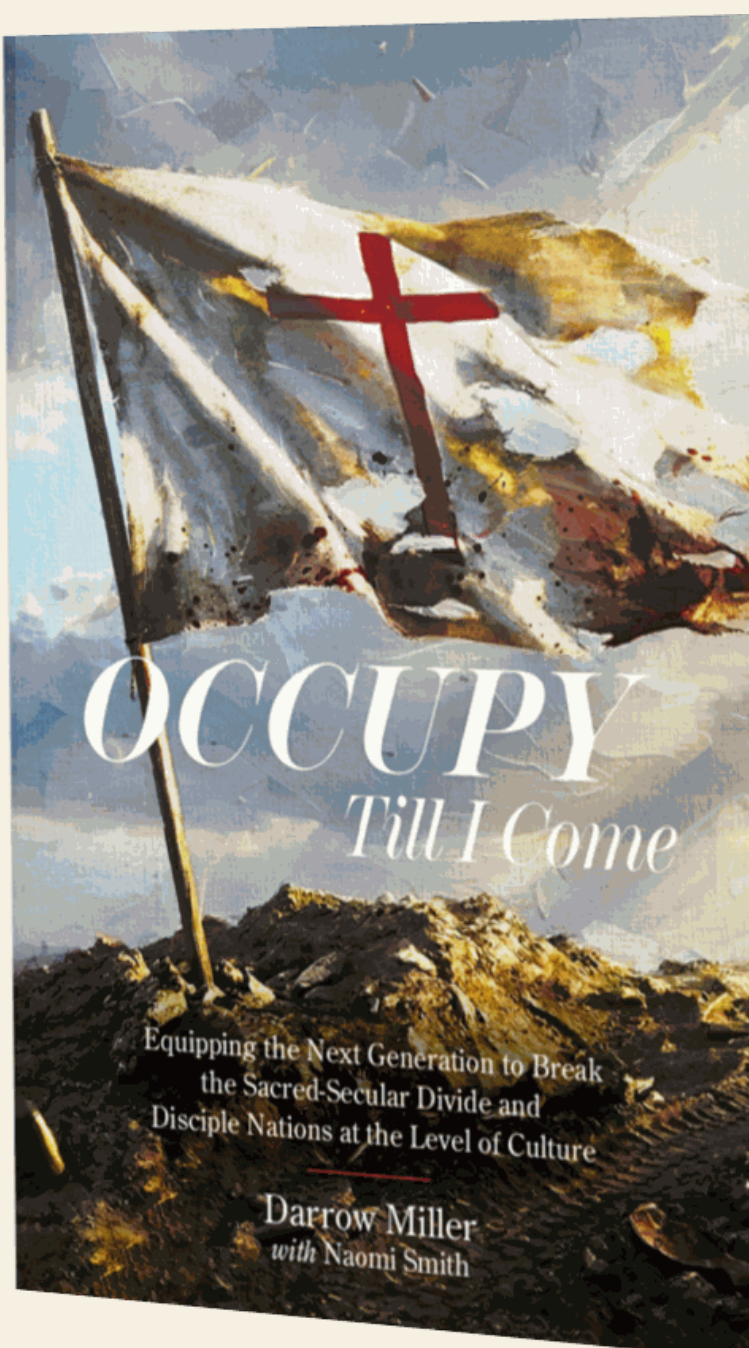




OCCUPY

Till I Come

Equipping the Next Generation to Break
the Sacred-Secular Divide and
Disciple Nations at the Level of Culture

Darrow Miller
with Naomi Smith

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SECTION 1: *Diagnosing Our Civilizational Crisis*

1 | THIS IS OUR CIVILIZATIONAL MOMENT

In his classic fantasy novel *The Fellowship of the Ring*, J. R. R. Tolkien pens a conversation between an unlikely hero, Frodo, and his wise master guide, Gandalf. As Gandalf reports on the aggressive onslaught of darkness in their world, Frodo laments that he must live in times when darkness is on the rise.

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

We live in a time when many nations are spiraling into lawlessness, chaos, and darkness. How are we as followers of Jesus Christ to respond? Are we to be passive in the face of evil? Are we to merely pray and wait for God to do something?

Instead, we are to proactively follow Spurgeon’s dictum on the balance between human responsibility and God’s sovereignty: “The best and wisest thing in the world is to work as if it all depended upon you, and then trust in God, knowing that it all depends on him.”

A Civilizational Moment

We don’t get to decide the times in which we live, but we ought to understand these times so we can know what to do. First, we need to acknowledge that we are living in a global, civilizational moment.

Os Guinness, in his profoundly important book *Our Civilizational Moment: The Waning of the West and the War of the Worlds*, introduces us to this crucial concept. Guinness defines a civilizational moment as “a critical transition phase in the rise, course, and decline of a civilization when it loses its decisive connection with the dynamic that inspired it.”

Often these civilizational moments are identified by the idiom “Crossing the Rubicon.” The Rubicon was a river that served as a marker in both space and time. In space, it was the boundary between the province of Gaul in the north and the rest of Italy in the south. In 49 BC, Julius Caesar led his army across the Rubicon, sparking a civil war in Rome, laying the groundwork for the expansion of the Roman Empire, and altering the course of history. Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon marked a pivotal moment in history.

“Crossing the Rubicon” has come to signify a seminal moment that sets in motion a new series of events, irreversibly changing the course of history. In these decisions, we are moving from the past into an unknown future.

Such a civilizational inflection point came when God called Abram (later Abraham) to leave his ancestral home and culture and follow the voice of God to an unknown place and future (Genesis 12). This obedience marked a break from Abram's pagan past, ushering in recognition of the one true Creator God.

This was followed by Moses leading the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt and the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai in approximately 1446 BC. This brought the revelation that the Creator was a moral God and that He had created a moral universe. The Ten Commandments reflect God's character, as expressed in moral law. The moral law became part of the foundation upon which Western civilization was built.

The most profound civilizational moment of all time came with the historic life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in Israel, culminating in AD 33. It was this reality that made salvation possible for humankind.

It's essential to recognize that Christ's life marked a significant shift in civilization from a pagan world to the emergence of what would become Western civilization. It also marked a change in era from BC (Before Christ) to AD (*Anno Domini*, after Christ). Other notable civilizational moments were the fall of Rome in AD 474, the Protestant Reformation in Europe beginning in 1415, and the penning of the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution at our nation's founding in 1776.

What causes these civilizational moments? On a transcendent level, it is God's sovereignty. On the human level, it is either the loss of vision, the inspiring metanarrative, or the recovery of the profound idea that once animated a civilization. Or, as in the example of Christ, the birth of a vision or ideal that ushers in a new civilization.

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, Western civilization is teetering on the edge of a cliff. We have become unmoored from the compelling vision that once animated our nation. During the rise and establishment of Western civilization, due to the straightforward Christian ethos, we witnessed the birth and growth of freedom, as well as the decline of paganism, resulting in a flourishing civilization. This civilization has been filled with beauty, art, relative social peace, and economic prosperity. It has also given rise to better health standards, longer life expectancies, and more empowering education.

As I write, we are witnessing a return to narcissistic paganism, growing chaos, and a corresponding rise in tyranny. We've lost our way. We have abandoned the founding narrative that began to be written thirty-five hundred years ago in the Middle East through God's revelation through Moses and the Hebrew people. This narrative brought with it the revelation that we live in a moral universe when the moral law was chiseled in stone as a blessing for all of humanity. The moral law led to a moral order that gave humanity meaning, freedom, and a path to human flourishing.

The West has lost its soul. This collapse we are experiencing is not the influence of an external foe but is emerging from within. We've transitioned from a predominantly Christian culture to one that is post-Christian. With this shift has come the loss of the powerful, moral, and metaphysical civilizational vision that the Jews inspired and the Christians later adopted, a vision coming from the Middle East.

We can be shocked awake by a terrorist attack such as the ones that took place in the United States on September 11, 2001, but understanding the internal moral and spiritual rot of the West requires a different kind of awareness. This also compels us to face our societal failure and to remember the roots upon which the West was founded. The attacks from abroad will create a reflexive response, whereas the problems within will require a depth of probing and analysis of the vision and faith that empowered the West in the first place. Are we willing to dig? Are you willing to reflect deeply on what has contributed to this moment of civilizational significance?

What the future holds is unknown. Here is the empowering thought: Whatever happens next will depend on the individual choices each one of us makes.

Take a moment to reflect on this: The choices you make and the life you live will shape the future for good or ill. Your life will affect not only your future but the collective future of your family, your community, and, in some small yet impactful way, your nation.

Os Guinness, in his book *Our Civilizational Moment*, presents us with three stark choices:

Such a moment must then issue in one of three broad options:

- [1] a renewal of the dynamic that inspired the civilization in the first place,
- [2] a successful replacement of the original dynamic by another, or
- [3] the decline of the civilization and perhaps the birth of a new and different civilization later in time and elsewhere in the world.

Again, take a moment to reflect on what Guinness has said. Which of these three options would you prefer? Which one do you think is most likely? How will you act to pursue your desired outcome? Guinness continues:

In sum, the issue for a civilization in a civilizational moment is its vision of ultimate reality [worldview]: Is the civilization in living touch with the ideas, ideals, and inspiration that created it and that it needs to continue to flourish? Or, with its roots severed and no replacement, is it about to decline and die?

Here, Guinness describes a “cut flower” civilization. Cut flowers look beautiful for a moment while they decorate our home or office. However, after a few days, the flowers begin to wither and fade. Their doom was assured when the flowers were separated from their roots. It is only a matter of time before the consequences of severance are made evident. Similarly, ideas have consequences. If you sever a nation from its moral and metaphysical grounding, that civilization will, in time, wither and die.

The United States was born out of the biblical worldview of the Protestant Reformation, which was characterized by a renewed conviction to build a culture based on the theistic Judeo-Christian worldview. In another part of the world, at around the same time, the French Revolution was a revolt against this worldview, embracing the atheistic worldview of the European Enlightenment—modernism. That set in motion a move in France from the concept of freedom to that of license.

America faces a civilizational divide today between two worldviews. The American Revolution (1776) returned to Judeo-Christian principles—freedom *of* religion within a moral universe acknowledging God. This “American Reformation” pursued truth and virtue, producing a culture of life. The French Revolution (1789) embodied Enlightenment atheism—freedom *from* religion in a purely material universe. This revolutionary spirit pursued power and license, producing a culture of death. One builds free societies through self-government under moral law. The other creates tyranny through autonomous freedom that becomes license.

We live in a *cut flower moment*—severed from our founding roots, we must choose between civilizational collapse and restoration. The chasm pits institutional elites operating from atheistic worldviews against ordinary citizens functioning from Judeo-Christian principles or their cultural memory. The choice remains: transcendent moral foundations or external control by those who reject moral order.

The United States is at a particularly polarizing moment that is tearing the country apart. It is a fight between two very different visions. One, known as Judeo-Christian theism, is rooted in biblical theism and the ancient faiths from the East. This was the bedrock of the nation’s founding as a Christian nation. The other is rooted in the atheist “Enlightenment” based on a godless world that provides the intellectual framework for the modern and postmodern worlds.

The Spiritual Battle Behind the Civilizational Moment

But might there be something deeper going on here? We in the West have mainly rejected the biblical worldview of a comprehensive universe that encompasses both physical and spiritual realities. Even those of us “Bible-believing” Christians

think mostly from a naturalistic worldview learned from our culture, bifurcated with a gnostic worldview for the religious portion of our lives.

However, could it be possible that the Bible is right about the supernatural world and that there truly are angels and demons that engage the natural world? If so, what are the implications of this reality for us daily? How might we interact with these spiritual beings without even realizing it?

When Jesus announced to the disciples that he was going to die, Peter challenged him by declaring, “It shall never be.” What was Christ’s response? “He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’”

Jesus acknowledged the demonic reality that had invaded that moment when Satan prompted Peter to challenge Christ (Matthew 16:13–28). Could it be possible that we interface with these spirits more often than we care to admit? Would it be possible that not all our ideas are our own? Could it even be that the very idea that there is no supernatural world serves as a demonic stronghold, keeping people from waking up to the true nature of the battle?

We receive revelation from the Word of God and the Holy Spirit—the *Paraclete*. We receive deceptive ideas from demonic sources.

The apostle Paul points us in this direction when he introduces two realities. The first is that the battle is for mental strongholds. He states this in 2 Corinthians 10:4–5: “The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

The word here is particularly revealing—it is the Greek *oxýrōma* (“a heavily fortified containment”). It is used for a literal fortress. But here, according to HELPS Word-Study on BibleHub.com, it is used figuratively of “a *false argument* in which a person seeks ‘shelter’ (‘a safe place’) to *escape reality*.” So, the safe spaces of the “woke” world are the mental fortresses that allow people to escape reality.

How do we overcome mental strongholds and arguments against God? The battle is not fought with physical weapons but with sound arguments and captivating ideas that transform lives. These challenge the hearts and minds of individuals and cultures:

- Love over hate
- Truth over lies
- Good over evil
- Beauty over hideousness
- Light over darkness

These are not the weapons of the world, but they have divine power to change lives.

Before there are physical battlements, there are fortresses of the mind. Other words for these mental fortresses are *lies* and *deceptions*. What stands behind these lies? The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12 that “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Behind the lies and deceptions of mental strongholds is the demonic realm. In our materialistic paradigm, it is hard for Westerners to conceive of evil as real and personal. However, we can see the results of demonic activity all around us in this fallen world.

C. S. Lewis captures this when, in *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape teaches his underling demon, Wormwood, how to deceive:

Even if a particular train of thought can be twisted so as to end in our favor, you will find that you have been strengthening in your patient the fatal habit of attending to universal issues and withdrawing his attention from the stream of immediate sense experiences. Your business is to fix his attention on the stream. Teach him to call it “real life” and don’t let him ask what he means by “real.”

As humans, it’s easy for us to look back at previous generations and see the consequences, whether good or bad, of their choices. It’s also a temptation to look ahead and dream about a better day when the complexities particular to our generation will be no more. But how do we accurately assess the times in which we live? It would not be an exaggeration to say that the fate of entire nations and the world rests in the church’s answer to this question.

Here Lewis illuminates an age-old tactic of the devil to deceive without being perceived. The best trick of the devil is to convince everyone that he does not exist!

The public intellectual and writer Naomi Wolf discusses the resurgence of evil in today’s world. She writes about the manifestation of evil in real space and time events:

The evil was like a mighty serpent lazing and luxuriating with impunity across the path of history. It was like a voracious dragon that grew stronger and more terrifying every day.

2020–2024 felt as if the maws of Hell had cracked open. You could see the flames; you could smell the sulfur.

This malevolence sought for four years to grab hold of and swallow up every blessing: children and babies. Pregnancy and lactation. Love and intimacy. Families. Holidays. Music and theater.

Could we be witnessing a moral metaphysical battle being played out in the systems and institutions of our nation? If so, do we have eyes to see it?

Could we truly characterize this civilizational moment as a battle between good and evil? If that is the case, where do we stand, and how should we respond?

Understanding Our Times

As humans, it's easy for us to look back at previous generations and see the consequences, whether good or bad, of their choices. It's also a temptation to look ahead and dream about a better day when the complexities particular to our generation will be no more. But how do we accurately assess the times in which we live? It would not be an exaggeration to say that the fate of entire nations and the world rests in the church's answer to this question.

When David became king of Israel, the various tribes and clans joined his army. The men of Issachar brought a particular gift with them to David's new kingdom. First Chronicles 12:32 refers to the men of Issachar as "men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."

This verse begs the following questions:

- What did the sons of Issachar see and understand?
- Are there any such sons living on the earth today?
- How do we, as the people of God, know what to do to fulfill His purposes in our generation?

The purpose of this book is to help us understand the times in which we live. We will ask and answer some basic questions:

- Where have these times come from?
- Where are they going?
- Are we, as the church, content with where we see things going?
- How are we to respond to our best assessment of these times?

Throughout this book, I will draw wisdom from several guides: Os Guinness, who gave me the language of the civilizational moment; Nathan Stone, whose article challenged my thinking and prompted me to write this book; Aaron M. Renn, who provided a broader context for where we are today; and G. K. Chesterton, who helped me solve a very thorny question.

Hope in Reality

While the reality of our current civilizational moment is complex and dark, we need not fear. God knows that Christ overcame the fear of death on the way to the cross (John 12:31). He conquered Satan at the cross (Colossians 2:15) and conquered death itself in the resurrection. He was coronated as King of heaven

and earth (Matthew 28:18) at the time of His ascension to heaven, where He sits at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19).

In time, He roams the earth in the Spirit through His twin manifestation as both the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and the Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5). If you need more assurance, know that He will return at the end of history with the fullness of His kingdom (Revelation 21:1–4).

While the problems we will examine in the next few chapters are dire, they are not the end of the story. These are the days in which we have been chosen to live. We need to live in the reality of the fullness of our story. We are called to face these days with courage, truth, love, and self-sacrifice. Let us watch for what God is doing in these dark times and join Him in His work.

I hope that, if you are struggling to make sense of the current state of our world, these reflections will be helpful. My prayer is that, as you find clarity, you will also be empowered by the Spirit of Christ to know what you ought to do.

STUDY GUIDE

Big Idea

We are living in a civilizational moment—a critical transition at a time in which Western civilization has lost its decisive connection with the Judeo-Christian worldview that inspired it. Like a “cut flower” civilization severed from its roots, we face three possibilities: renewal of our Christian foundations, replacement by another dynamic, or civilizational decline and death. Behind this cultural crisis lies a spiritual battle for mental strongholds, calling us to understand our times, as did the sons of Issachar, and respond with courage, truth, and love.

Paradigm-Shifting Words and Phrases

- **Civilizational moment:** A critical transition phase in the rise, course, and decline of a civilization when it loses its decisive connection with the dynamic that inspired it.
- **“Crossing the Rubicon”:** Points of no return that irreversibly change the course of history, marking seminal moments that set new series of events in motion.
- **“Cut flower” civilization:** A culture severed from its moral and spiritual roots that will inevitably wither and die, much like cut flowers separated from their life-giving source.
- **Mental strongholds:** Fortresses of the mind—false arguments and deceptions in which people seek “shelter” to escape reality, defended by lies that must be conquered with truth.

Applications for Individuals and Groups

Individual Action: This week, identify one specific area in which you can “work as if it all depended upon you,” while trusting God for the outcome. Choose something concrete—perhaps by speaking the truth where it might be costly, being part of a group that is seeking to bless the community, or writing a paper or article promoting truth to challenge a cultural lie.

Group Action: As a group, commit to spending time each week praying for wisdom to understand current events through a biblical lens and discuss how you can collectively influence your community for good.

For Further Study

1 Chronicles 12:32—The men of Issachar who had understanding of the times and knew what Israel ought to do.

Reflection: What specific steps can you take to develop the wisdom of Issachar in understanding your cultural moment? How might God be calling you to lead others in discerning His will for this generation?

Genesis 12:1–3—God’s call to Abraham to leave his culture and follow Him to an unknown future.

Reflection: What aspects of your current culture might God be calling you to “leave behind” in order to follow Him more faithfully? How does Abraham’s courage to cross his own “Rubicon” inspire your response to God’s calling in this civilizational moment?

2 Corinthians 10:4–5—The divine weapons for destroying strongholds and taking every thought captive to Christ.

Reflection: What specific mental strongholds do you recognize in your own thinking or in your community? How can you actively use truth, love, and beauty as weapons to tear down lies and deceptions?

Ephesians 6:10–18—The armor of God for spiritual warfare against principalities and powers.

Reflection: How does recognizing that our struggle is against spiritual forces change your approach to cultural and political engagement? Which pieces of God’s armor do you most need to strengthen in your life right now?