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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide to the book *Prepare*, by J. Paul Nyquist, is published in response to many readers of the book who have wanted to discuss its ideas and apply its themes to their lives. The topics of *Prepare* continue to remain timely to Christians in America and abroad, where opposition to the Christian faith and lifestyle has become increasingly apparent. Both Dr. Nyquist and the publisher of *Prepare* (Moody Publishers, 2015) desire that this study guide will help you grow strong in your faith as well as confident in God the Father and Jesus the Son and Savior in trying times. Let's remember such times offer great opportunity to honor Christ as we declare the good news of salvation and demonstrate His compassion to those who oppose us.

This Guide is equally useful for small-group discussion and private study of *Prepare*. The first section of each chapter, titled "The Issues," will help readers consider key themes associated with living their faith in a hostile culture. "The Issues" includes brief summaries of key ideas, each followed by one or two questions that help you explore truths in the book and better understand and apply them to your life. Some of the questions enable you to look at key Bible verses from the chapter in more detail, again to understand them better and apply them to your life.

The second section, "Ponder and Discuss," highlights (in italics) key statements in the chapter worthy of further reflection and application. The questions are intended to spark discussion. If you are using this guide for private study, the questions should enable you to see action steps to take personally and should enliven your prayer times and personal study of the Scriptures.

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The goal of this guide is to give each reader of *Prepare* a deeper understanding of the resources at our disposal as opposition and even persecution are encountered in this hostile world. There is confidence, peace, and even joy as we serve our God steadfastly. And as noted in several chapters, when we are prepared to love and serve in a hostile world, our godly responses to persecution will both surprise those who oppose us and offer us opportunities to present our Christian faith. May all of this bring honor to Christ, our Savior.

INTRODUCTION

THE ISSUES

Houston city officials in 2014 ordered five area pastors to surrender all sermons, emails, and text messages that mentioned homosexuality, gender issues, or Mayor Annise Parker. The springboard for their subpoena of these documents was a successful petition drive, signed by church members and others, to create a public referendum on a new city law called the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance.

1. What issues are involved when church members sign petitions and file a lawsuit when the necessary petitions are rejected? Do you believe Christians have a right to be involved this way in politics?

2. If you were a member of the church and learned your pastor's messages were being examined by the city, how would you react? If you were a ministry leader at one of those five Houston churches, how would you feel?

John S. Dickerson predicts the rate of cultural change in America will accelerate “as the oldest two generations die, taking their

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traditional values and votes with them.” Another respected pastor, Erwin Lutzer, declares much of our Judeo-Christian heritage is already gone, replaced by “an intolerant form of humanism.” He concludes, “The cultural war we used to speak about appears to be over, and we have lost.”

3. If these two pastors are correct, these are dire warnings for followers of Jesus. To what extent do you think they are right—is this overstating the situation? Give reasons for your conclusion.

Christianity Today reported that although martyrdoms doubled in 2013, “most persecution is not violence. It’s a ‘squeeze’ [or pressuring] of Christians in one of five spheres of life: private, family, community, national, and church.”

4. Although death is typically painful and certainly final, there is much suffering in threats, personal estrangement, and isolation from one’s family, community, and church. Which would be most difficult for you to accept, and why?

PONDER AND DISCUSS

For nearly 250 years, Christians in America were able to live in relative freedom from persecution. . . .

But we're witnessing an epic change in our culture—a spiritual climate shift threatening to reshape life as we know it. Hostility and intolerance are replacing toleration. Rejection and even hatred are pushing aside acceptance.

1. What examples of rejection, hostility, intolerance or even hatred have you or some Christian you know experienced in the past that would support this claim?

Despite more frequent episodes of persecution many American citizens have not personally experienced suffering for standing for their faith and Christian values. Dr. Nyquist compares our situation with that of the disciples prior to Christ's march to the cross:

Christ predicted persecution as His disciples struggled with the requirements of following Him. . . . He reminded them the world would "hate them just as it has hated Me." I suspect until the Passion Week the disciples were much like us—they heard Jesus' words and sought to understand them. But until they were actually experiencing these truths, the disciples—like us—couldn't quite connect with what their Teacher was saying. Events in the book of Acts quickly remedied that.

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2. After reading the introduction to *Prepare*, do you think that Jesus' warnings are relevant and applicable to the time we are currently living in? Explain why or why not.

PART ONE

The New Reality

1

AWAKENING TO A DIFFERENT WORLD

THE ISSUES

The Definition of Marriage

Dr. Nyquist explores “four game-changing developments” that demonstrate that Christian tenets have been challenged and dismissed by American society. The first is the abandonment of biblical marriage through three key decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court: (1) dismissing in 2013 the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that defined marriage as one man and one woman; (2) refusing in 2014 to hear appeals of five states, reinforcing the national scope of the decision; and more recently (3) the 2015 decision declaring the right of same-sex couples to marry “is part of the liberty promised by the Fourteenth Amendment.”

1. Consider the definition of marriage offered by DOMA and originating in the Bible (Gen. 2:23)—a union between one man and one woman—and that of the Supreme Court—two persons. What are two or three reasons the first definition is more accurate? What could you say to someone who prefers the definition given by the court?

Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty

The second development is the government's erosion of Christian freedom. Three classic examples involve a baker, a florist, and a photographer (from three different states) who refused to provide wedding services to a same-sex couple because of the vendors' religious belief that marriage is between a man and a woman. They faced ridicule, boycotts, and state sanctions because of their opposition. One closed her shop. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act did not protect them as individuals.

2. Should we expect the government to protect individual merchants and businesspeople who refuse to provide their services for activities they do not believe in? Why or why not?

3. If you were (or are) a baker, florist, or photographer, would you refuse to cater or provide services for a same-sex wedding? What if you were faced with government fines or penalties as a result of your refusal?

The third development is special considerations given to special interest groups, including those in the LGBT community. Laws could require religious nonprofit organizations and Christian colleges and universities to hire gay and transgender individuals as part of "non-discriminatory" hiring.

4. The community standards of a Christian college, typically guided by biblical principles, often lead to a code of conduct. In the case of Gordon College, what is the most compelling argument its leaders can offer for not adding to its staff members of the LGBT community? What can they do to respond with love and grace and still honor the Scriptures?

Anti-Christian Hostility

The fourth development is outright hostility toward Christianity.

5. Mike Adams was a tenured professor and received two faculty awards and strong reviews. Yet he was denied promotion to full professor when he spoke about his faith. He won his day in court, being awarded his professorship with back pay. That was justice, but often justice does not take place. If you were in a situation at work where you were told not to read your Bible or pray alone during breaks or else risk demotion, what would you do? Why?
6. Five incidents of antagonistic actions against individuals and groups are listed on the final page of the chapter. Which one of these is most disturbing to you and why?

PONDER AND DISCUSS

But despite efforts to equate the discrimination against the LGBT community with the enslavement of African Americans, the issues are fundamentally different. While there's nothing sinful about having black or white skin, the Bible says homosexual behavior and changing one's gender is wrong—an affront to the Creator (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26–27).

1. Do you agree with this argument? Why or why not?

2. What is the challenge of presenting this argument to someone who says that truth is relative—“It’s your truth, not mine”? How could you present this reality to someone who questions that sin exists, or that God exists?

2

CROSSING THE RUBICON

THE ISSUES

Cultural Decay

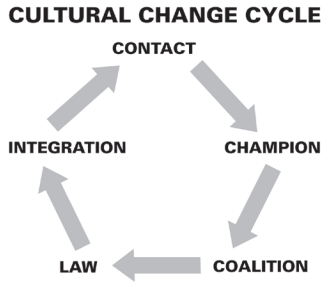
Dr. Nyquist describes this chapter as “a cultural postmortem” on how America became a “highly individualized, relativistic, anti-Christian culture.” A literal postmortem is an examination of the deceased to determine the cause or causes of death. A figurative postmortem examines causes that contributed to the demise or failure of a project or institution.

1. Do you consider all Christian values to be wholly rejected by American society at large? Or to put it another way, is “Christian America” dead, a relic of the past? Explain why or why not.

Change in a culture takes place over time and follows a five-step process: (1) A contact happens, (2) a champion emerges, (3) a coalition builds, (4) a law is passed, and (5) integration occurs. Each cultural

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change follows this cyclical movement that influences key issues and how and why people do things. The cycle is reproduced below:



2. A coalition must be gained (step 3) to reach “a tipping point” where a law is advocated or challenged that leads to cultural change. This is when debate between the coalition for change and its opponents takes place. In what ways can Christian citizens influence the argument before and during the coalition’s growth? Discuss how this can be done publicly and privately.

3. Why do you think many Christians have declined to be involved in these approaches—both by outward actions and private prayers?

Nyquist traces the five-step process of cultural change that has occurred regarding the nature of religious freedom through legal interpretations of the “establishment of religion” clause in the Constitution’s First Amendment. Under step four, he summarizes seven laws spanning fifty-one years (1962–2013). He begins with the case *Engel v. Vitale*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that prayer and Bible reading in public schools violate the establishment of religion clause. He ends with *United States v. Windsor*, which ruled the Defense of Marriage Act (marriage is only between one man and one woman) as unconstitutional.

4. Nyquist argues that the Supreme Court’s removal of religious influence in the making of laws has led to a slippery slope of laws redefined that allow abortions to minors and marriage to any two adult persons. How important are religious principles to establishing and maintaining laws? To what extent should high-court judges weigh religious commands, which English legal scholar William Blackstone regarded as “binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times” (p. 43)?

Liberty and Worldview

In the case of *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the Supreme Court extended the constitutional right to liberty to a personal understanding,

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writing “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

5. What are the dangers of making liberty subject to one’s personal concept of existence and meaning?

PONDER AND DISCUSS

Is gay marriage the logical end to our cultural change? With privacy and individualism reigning supreme in our courts, and with a relativistic philosophy devoid of absolutes dominating individuals around the country, what else could we see in this country in the name of marriage? Is polygamy wrong? Is incest out of the question?

1. The final two questions above are rhetorical in nature, assuming the answers are both no, or at least not necessarily. Do you think Dr. Nyquist is being alarmist, or is that a possibility? Defend your answer and discuss it with others.

2. What response could you give to those who would say, “In the privacy of your home it is okay” (which is the argument that overturned sodomy laws in America [*Lawrence v. Texas*])?