

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 4 Issue 21

JANUARY 21, 2024

Culture (A time of unsettledness)



I enjoy tipping more than the cultural norm suggests. I have done this for most of my adult life and I realize that my ability to do this is one sign of my privileged life. But it's still a choice.

One change to my tipping habit changed because of COVID, however. After hearing please on behalf of food service

workers to add a tip for carryout orders, I did the same. Now that dining in-person is possible again, I haven't changed my habit.

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Humble & Kind (ancient wisdom)



Lori McKenna captured the essence of wisdom passed on by parents, grandparents, and guardians in her hit song, "Humble & Kind." She won a Grammy for best Country Song, "Song of the Year" at 2016 CMA Awards and "Country Song of the Year"

at 2016 American Music Awards.

Oh, how I wish more folks actually followed this ancient advice. Particularly those running for political office. But, on the other hand, it is voters who decide whether they believe humble and kind are desirable characteristics for leaders.

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EVERYONE
HAVE A
WONDERFUL
AND SAFE
WEEK!!



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Admittedly, I struggle with how much to tip when I pick up a pizza or some other carryout order. After all, I'm carrying my food home in a box or bag and no one is bringing me a beverage refill or extra butter. But the crew that prepares my pizza knows my name when I walk in the door.

Sociologist Ann Swidler offers an interesting perspective on cultural changes in her influential article, "Culture in Action." In her article, she describes how we follow cultural norms during a time when society seems settled. During a settled time, we share common beliefs regarding how society should operate. So we don't think about the choices we make, but do as others do.

Our settledness unsettles, however, when we believe society has stopped working in important ways.

When things are unsettled, we tend to abandon old habits and question many of our core assumptions. We rethink whether a different way makes more sense. Swidler argues we insist and believe we're pursuing the same ends we did before, even as we change our ways. And we'll justify our changes using the same phrases we used before to describe different actions.

Two events that quickly unsettle cultures are war and economic depression. During the 1930s, the U.S. experienced both. David Leonhardt argues that this period of unsettledness allowed our country to rethink, among other societal norms, the relationship between workers and employers, and government's role in these relationships.

During this time, leaders like Paul Hoffman helped our country to rethink what it means to be a citizen and how societal expectations should affect decisions regarding wages and profits. As President of Studebaker, Hoffman had credibility. As a professor, he had a platform that helped shape future business leaders.

Hoffman told students that our democracy was at risk because people had stopped fighting for the common good and started fighting one another. The solution to saving democracy, according to Hoffman, was for leaders of business, labor, farming, and government to stop looking out only for their narrow interests and start caring about America as a whole.

Leonhardt argues that a shift in cultural norms ushered in an era of democratic capitalism. Company leaders still focused on profits and still measured success by the size of paychecks and bank accounts. However, an emerging cultural norm suggested there are reasonable limits to how much, even the most successful leaders, should make.

Leonhardt points to the example of George Romney, then President of American Motors, who told his Board Members too much income was a distraction for any leader. The Board agreed to cap his income at \$225,000. Romney later became Governor of Michigan and made an unsuccessful bid to be the Republican Presidential candidate in 1968. An interesting side note is that critics questioned his eligibility since he was born in Mexico.

A new cultural norm made it seem both possible and natural for Romney to make a decision that would seem ludicrous decades earlier.

Upcoming Worship Series "Country"

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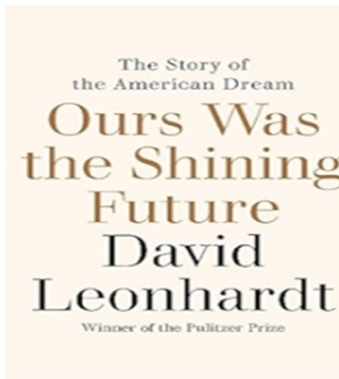


What does the "American Dream" mean to you personally? A common description of the American Dream "Was the ability of people to rise above the circumstances of their birth." Does it still exist?

So far this century, campaign slogans promise to restore the American Dream, implying that it is no longer relevant for the current generation. Thousands cross our borders every day in pursuit of just such a promise that seems impossible in their native land.

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Book Club News



Our companion book for our new worship is David Leonhardt's book, *Ours was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream*.

Amazon's website describes his book this way:

Two decades into the twenty-first century, the stagnation of living standards has become the defining trend of American life. Life expectancy has declined, economic inequality has soared, and, after some progress, the Black-white wage gap is once again as large as it was in the 1950s. How did

this happen in the world's most powerful country? And what happened to the "American dream" - the promise of a happier, healthier, more prosperous future—which was once such an inextricable part of our national identity?

Drawing on decades of writing about the economy for *The New York Times*, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer David Leonhardt examines the past century of American history, from the Great Depression to today's Great Stagnation, in search of an answer.

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Upcoming Worship Series — “Country” ..cont from pg 4

On Valentine’s Day in 2012, Trigger Coroneos posted a brief article that suggested a reshaping of the American Dream is emerging. “Instead of declaring the death of The American Dream, perhaps it is changing from one that uses traditional economic parameters to gauge its health, to ones that instead gauge the happiness and fulfillment of the individual.”

But what does the American Dream, country music and scripture have in common? The answer is not just politics. However, politicians use all three in their pursuit of votes. Did I mention that 2024 is a presidential election year?

Welcome to our new worship series, *Country*.

Over the next six weeks, our messages will consider the intersection of scripture, the American Dream, and country music. We’re using David Leonhardt’s recently published book, *Ours was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream*, as a companion. See our Book Club News article for a reading schedule.

In his book, Leonhardt retraces the history of the American Dream and explores the somber news of our shared dream’s demise. In the first two decades of the 21st century, we’re experiencing the stagnation of living standards, a declining life expectancy, and rising economic inequality.

And the vast majority of us are feeling the loss.

Scripture tells us that God chose the Israelites as a starting point for reconciling the world with God’s divine plan for peace and prosperity. And our salvation story reflects our shared dream as Americans. So what went wrong?

“Feed Flint”



“Feed Flint”

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A meal goes a long way for a senior living alone, a family struggling to make ends meet, or a child fearful of empty shelves at home. But for the residents of Flint who carry the effects of lead-tainted water, nutrition is critical. Feed Flint provides locally grown, chemical-free, fresh produce to residents living in and around Flint. And we're hoping that you can help us provide 10,000 meals this summer.

Feed Flint includes takeout meals, produce boxes with recipes, and home deliveries as part of our work to guide and support families in moving to sustainable abundance. The reality is that Michigan's food insecurity levels got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this summer's recovery is leaving behind those at the most risk of having to miss meals.

Flint families continue to struggle with the ongoing effects of the water crisis.

We're bringing together the resources of the Asbury Community Development Corporation. This includes Asbury Farms, the South Flint Soup Kitchen, the Asbury Community Help Center, multiple food pantries, and our Sizzling Culture Mobile Food Trailer. Our plan is to care for our neighbors when they need it most. We accept all people as they are, and our doors are always open to anyone.

Asbury Farms provides locally grown produce used to create fabulous and nutritious meals. Our seed-to-table approach is community-based. This not only helps families make it through emergencies and crises. We help move families towards sustainable abundance.

Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated abundance.

Our work is also about food and justice. Our vision is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into active citizens. And all residents can enjoy safety, good health, and a culture that fosters life-long learning and satisfying lives. This summer, help us address food insecurity and strengthen Flint's budding local food system by supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're doing and considering how you can help.

Donate to our Feed Flint Campaign by visiting:
flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:

Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be.

Luke 12:13-15

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

Five horizontal lines for taking notes.

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

- 1. Read Luke 12:13-15 and reflect on what it means to you. Now read verses 16 to 31. What thoughts and images come to mind as you read this text? What contradictions do you notice between what Jesus says and life as you experience it?
2. Read this week's articles titled Humble and kind. What words of wisdom do you follow that you learned as you began adulthood? Who are some examples of persons who seem to try hard to be humble and kind? How does this affect the people around them? What might unity look like for our country? Where does your hope lie?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.



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Our clients need bottled water for cooking,
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Flint MI 48507

Any questions, please call 239-3427 or 235-0016 or

Email us at southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

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More Information :



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To make sense of the rise and subsequent fall of the American dream, Leonhardt tells the story of the modern American economy as an ongoing battle between two competing forms of capitalism: one that envisions prosperity for most, and one that serves the individual and favors the wealthy. In vivid prose, *Ours Was the Shining Future* traces how democratic capitalism flourished to make the American dream possible, until the latter decades of the twentieth century when, bit by bit, the dream was corrupted to serve only the privileged few.

Ours Was the Shining Future is a sweeping narrative full of innovation and grit, human drama and hope. Featuring the trailblazing figures who helped shape the American dream—Frances Perkins, Paul Hoffman, Cesar Chavez, Robert Kennedy, A. Philip Randolph, Grace Hopper, and more—this engaging history reveals the power of grass-roots democratic movements from across the political spectrum. And though the American dream feels lost to us now, Leonhardt shows how Americans—if they commit themselves to transforming the economy, as they did in the past—have the power to revive the dream once more.

We have a limited number of copies of David Leonhardt's book. His book was recently published and is available in hardback and electronic formats. The book is 528 pages. And, while Leonhardt is a gifted writer, the subject matter presumes foundational knowledge regarding politics and economics. Fortunately, the writer is able to explain complex topics at a level using language most of us can understand.

Here is the schedule of chapters for our *Country Series*:

Jan 7	Chapters Intro - 1
Jan 14	Chapters 2 - 3
Jan 21	Chapters 4 - 5
Jan 28	Chapters 6 - 7
Feb 4	Chapters 8 - 9
Feb 11	Chapters 10 - 9 + Conclusion

Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that week's chapters. You can anticipate spoiler alerts unless you keep up with the pace. You can purchase your own copy or visit your local library.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question or enter a prayer request on our website's homepage — FlintAsburyChurch.org.

Pastor Tommy

David Leonhardt. *Ours was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2023.

Cash or checks can be sent to/dropped off at South Flint Soup Kitchen, 3410 Fenton Road, Flint, MI 48507. Please make checks out to South Flint Soup Kitchen!

Online at www.mightycause.com/feedflint

Donations can be dropped off Monday-Friday 11am-12Noon. Calling ahead is not necessary, but our needs change frequently, so calling ahead of time is a good idea!

Give time! We need volunteers!!! Volunteers arrive at 9:30am and are done by 12:30pm. Tasks include handing out lunches, assisting in the Angel Closet, light cleaning, putting together items to pass out to clients, and more.

Refer people!!

Questions??? Call 810-239-3427
or email southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

God assured the exiled Israelites, through the Prophet Jeremiah, not to give up their dreams for a better life. God has a plan.

I along know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for.

Jeremiah 29:11

Dreams show up in art. The artist pours out their heart on canvas, in their movements, through their instruments, voices, writings, and other means of expression. Art, at its best, is the voice of God speaking through ordinary creatures.

I believe Trigger is correct in his assessment that “Music is the weapon of the great awakening, and the bullhorn in the reshaping of the American Dream.” And clearly the country music genre is a rather large bullhorn. According to CMA, approximately reaches approximately 139 million. A survey by ARPA found that 40% of those surveyed listen to country music.

This year, our country elects our president for the next four years along with a myriad of other public officials. While we do not intend to tell you who to vote for, we hope to highlight some of our common struggles and issues that should influence our choices.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes on our [YouTube Channel](#). We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website](#) at [FlintAsbury.org](#).

Pastor Tommy

David Leonhardt. *Ours was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2023.

Kyle “Trigger” Coroneos. “Music, and the Reshaping of The American Dream,” © SavingCountryMusic.com., February 14, 2012. Retrieved from: [Link to Article](#)

It was Tim McGraw's recording of McKenna's song that propelled it to the number one spot. And according to a Time Magazine article by Charlotte Alter, this country artist works hard at living up to the advice he sings about. One of his goals, according to his "Person of the Week" interview, is for country music to help unify our country.

McGraw shared what he hopes can happen. "I want what's best for our country. I want what's best for most people in our country. I think everybody deserves the right to live their life in the best way that they possibly can and to soar in the best way."

Perhaps being raised by a single mother helps McGraw put things into a more realistic perspective. McKenna notes that "His audience is a true cross-section of the American electorate."

Here's the paradox. Our standard of living and life expectancy steadily increased after the Great Depression thanks, in large part, to a partnership of business, government, and organized labor. Since then, we are allowed our leaders to move us toward different ideas.

People are mostly unpredictable. Tim Palmer explains humans are "non-linear." In other words, outputs are not in direct proportion to inputs. Like forecasting weather, humans are nonlinear systems and difficult to predict. He explains that if we win big in the lottery, we're ecstatic. However, if we win four times as much, we're not four times as ecstatic.

We're non-linear and life is unpredictable. "Life seems to progress smoothly and predictably for much of the time. Indeed, it seems one of our biggest concerns appears to be getting stuck in a rut. But then, seemingly out of nowhere, our world is turned upside down," notes Palmer.

We often say that hindsight is 20/20. Afterwards, we look back and we see the problems that were not so visible when it was happening. David Leonhardt describes in this week's chapters from our companion book for this series, the clarity we now have regarding systemic racism that continued long after emancipation.

Statistically, African Americans benefited economically from the New Deal policies that Leonhardt describes as democratic capitalism, despite their exclusion from programs intended to improve the lives of working Americans. He writes that "Lawmakers in Congress and state legislatures, as well as police officers, school administrators, business executives, and citizen vigilantes around the country all played a part. Trying to prevent Black Americans from joining the middle class was government policy, sometimes written into law and other times... enforced by government officials."

The policies and practices put in place after the Great Depression benefited everyone. Even black Americans who were systemically discriminated against. It took courage and an awakening before some of our discriminatory practices were eliminated.

But there's a lot of work left to do. Despite the advances made in the last century, people of color continue to experience discrimination in the workplace and in the streets. Meanwhile, the blurred focus of our national leaders seems self-serving.

According to Luke, Jesus was asked one day to weigh in on a dispute between two brothers. One brother asked Jesus to tell his sibling to divide the property with him. Avoiding the likely trap set for Him. Jesus moved the subject from property to human relationships.

“Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed,” Jesus said, “Because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be .”

Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be.

Luke 12: 13-15

I believe that pursuing humble and kind is more reflective of our true life than we realize.

Lori McKenna, Tim McGraw, and others reflect both the hopes and disappointments for a large cross-section of Americans. They write and sing both for fame and in the hope of a better future.

But a better future is ultimately up to you and me. We may not vote on bills that come to the floor in congress, but we can cast a vote for those who represent us. Humble and kind seem like biblical attributes that deserve priority in our decisions.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our [website's](#) homepage - [Click here to watch.](#) This button takes you to our [YouTube channel!](#) You can find more information about us on our website at [FlintAsburyChurch.org.](http://FlintAsburyChurch.org)

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Parts of our series was inspired by David Leonhardt. *Ours was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream.* New York: Penguin Random House, 2023.

Charlotte Alter. “Tim McGraw on How Music Can Heal Divisions in America.” © Time Magazine, November 2, 2023. Retrieved from: [link](#).

Tim Palmer. “Why the world feels so unstable right now.” © BBC, 5th February 2023. Retrieved from: [link](#).

Because of changes in cultural norms, compensation for CEOs rose modestly from the 1940s through the 1970s, and the gap between CEO and common worker's pay continued to decline. According to Leonhardt, while Mitt Romney shared many of the same convictions as his father, limiting his own compensation was not one of them. Cultural norms regarding compensation differentials were already changing.

Jesus Christ arrived in our world during an unsettled time in first century Palestine. Even His arrival was unsettling. And His teachings continue to unsettle us anytime we are willing to reconsider our core values and consider a different approach.

The Kingdom of heaven is like this... those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last.

Matthew 20:1-16

One day, Jesus told a controversial story that questioned cultural norms. There was this vineyard owner who needed workers and will pay the prevailing wage of one silver coin per day. Jesus tells us that some workers started that morning, and a few more started midday. Still more began

work in the afternoon. Altogether, start time varies from morning throughout the day, with the last workers showing up not long before quitting time.

The owner presented an oral contract to the first workers. However, those hired later were told they would receive a fair wage without specifics. The latter hires had to trust the owner's sense of fairness.

When it came time to pay the workers, the vineyard owner started with those who came last, giving each one silver coin. He continued paying the workers who came latest before paying those who started earlier. But in all cases, the pay was the same. Each worker received the prevailing rate for a day's work of one silver coin.

This did not sit well with those who punched in at the start of the day. Why should those who only worked a couple hours receive the same pay as them they argued?

The vineyard owner pushed back on their complaints. "I have not cheated you," he responded. "You agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?"

Experts connect this story with one that comes right before this one. A wealthy man asked Jesus what it would take for him to enter God's Kingdom. When the man learned that it would take giving up his wealth, he left saddened by his new insight.

Entrepreneurs risk wealth and work hard for the success of their business. They're the first workers on the scene. It makes sense that they receive the biggest reward. This understanding is our cultural norm. This is also how capitalism works.

Adam Smith, a moral philosopher, is usually credited with the idea of capitalism. In his masterwork, "The Wealth of Nations", Adam described emotional and moral influences that affect human behavior, such as, pride, envy, and respect. He briefly mentioned an invisible hand associated with individual self-interest that some argue makes capitalism work best without government interference.

However, mostly, we don't make independent judgments about moral issues. It would be overwhelming. Rather, our behavior is influenced by culture. Common practices that guide how we interact with friends, relatives, colleagues, and strangers. In other words, culture.

The cultural norms that evolved after the Great Depression lasted until another period of unsettledness emerged mid-century. By the late 20th century, the cultural limits on top executive income were gone and a handful of individuals since then have risen to unimaginable levels of wealth. The gap between rich and poor continues to grow even while the average worker's wages fails to keep pace with rising cost.

Leonhardt notes it will take a substantial disruption to unsettle the existing culture that coalesced around a new model of capitalism that favors the wealthy at the expense of the rest. However, we should not expect change to come from business leaders.

Instead, our democratic system is ideally situated for intervention. Leonhardt cites examples where government programs benefited all of us including businesses. By 1960, argues Leonhardt, "The economy had become less unequal than it

had been at the start of the twentieth century as a result of the acquisition of political power by workers and the changed culture of corporate America. And economic growth had surged."

However, the political power gained by labor did not come only from grit. Instead, culture settled on a new norm, even while using familiar language to describe actions.

Jesus tells us His Kingdom often works against cultural norms. Whether settled or unsettled, Jesus asks us to think hard about our core beliefs and priorities. And consider a different way of doing business. We learn to rethink our decisions based on God's plan for abundance.

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