

FOREWORD

Philosophers often use the word *reductionistic* to describe the modern Western world. In doing so, they're describing a habit that, like many habits, can be helpful but, if taken to excess, can become problematic.

Reductionism is the habit of "boiling things down" or "putting things in a nutshell." For example, the statement "The universe is a clock, and God is the intelligent designer of the clock" makes certain things clear and accessible, but it can obscure and distort other things.

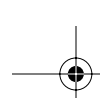
We Christians haven't been immune to this habit. The Bible, for example, gives us "the gospel" in four Gospel accounts, plus a number of letters and other supporting documents, but we often want to boil down the gospel to Romans 3:23 or put it in the nutshell of John 3:16. We want to reduce it to a formula that can be conveyed in a short booklet or diagrammed on a restaurant placemat.

Again, doing so can be helpful. I've filled up a lot of placemats myself in a lot of restaurants in my attempts to share the gospel with a friend. But we need to be on the alert for the ways we can take boiling, nutshelling and otherwise reducing to excess.

That's why the book you've just begun reading is so important and valuable. Neil Livingstone loves the gospel, and he loves the Bible, and he wants to help you counter reductionism by giving you a guided tour of the rich gallery of metaphors available to communicate the good news of Jesus.

A less useful book would attack one kind of reductionism and replace it with a competing one. But this book is like a photo album. It will show





you a wide variety of photos that capture different sides of the “personality” of the gospel. When you’re finished, you’ll feel you know the gospel in a deeper way. You’ll see how rich and deep and multifaceted it is. And in the process you’ll learn how to think more creatively and theologically—not an insignificant byproduct!

If you take advantage of the various exercises at the end of the book and—even better—if you invite a group of friends to read the book and do the exercises together, I am confident that something wonderful will happen. Of course, you’ll get a better picture of the good news, which is wonderful enough. But beyond that, through extended, prayerful and shared reflection on the gospel in its amazing richness and depth, you will experience transformation by it.

This is the tragedy of a boiled down or reduced gospel: it has only a fraction of the transforming power of the robust, rich, multilayered and multi-textured gospel. I guess little nutshells were made to be broken open so that from their seed a huge tree can grow.

I’ve known Neil for many years, and I’ve seen his passion for the gospel consistently call him forward in his journey as a disciple and a leader. He lives what he teaches, and he is a truly good teacher. Of course, you’re about to find that out for yourself.

Brian McLaren

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