

INTRODUCTION

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’” 1 Samuel 16:7 ESV

For more than 25 years, I have built a career in manufacturing, working for companies like Crown Equipment Corporation, NN Inc., and American Trim in analytical roles. My work has been centered on identifying operational challenges and developing practical, result-driven solutions to close performance gaps. In addition to my professional experience, I served for eight years as a bi-vocational evangelist, ministering to communities throughout Ohio and Michigan.

While ministering, I’ve met people whom society often labeled as spiritually broken or beyond hope—those facing life-altering medical diagnoses, experiencing homelessness, battling addiction, ashamed because they were sexually abused, bullied

by people in their lives, living in poverty or broken homes, caring for loved ones with special needs... the list goes on and on.

When I ministered to these individuals, I would listen to them talk about their lives to understand their current mental, physical, and spiritual state and where they wanted to be in the future. During our conversations, they would share about their loss of hope, their struggles, their fears... their brokenness. The more they shared about their lives, it was easy to see why society deemed them as broken or beyond hope.

Being a follower of Jesus, I have come to the realization, "Throughout our lives, we will be subjected to hardships and trials and our ability to endure and overcome the hardship or trial depends on how much **HOPE** we have in our lives." Proverbs 18:14 (ESV), written by Solomon, tells us, "A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?"

Using my analytical skills to gather knowledge and insights from each interaction, I examined the

information and clear patterns began to surface; revealing that a key cause of people's loss of hope and feelings of isolation was their inability to align with society's expected "social norms."

Social norms defined by UNICEF are, "The shared, informal, and unwritten rules, expectations, or standards of behavior that govern acceptable actions within a group or society."¹ These unwritten expectations are designed to shape how individuals are supposed to behave within a group or community. As societies change, some of these norms remain consistent, some norms evolve or are adjusted, and entirely new ones emerge.

When a person doesn't abide by the social norms set by society, they are often seen as different and often trigger a negative response by society; sometimes leading to isolation and abandonment. As a follower of Jesus, I was reminded isolation is not only

¹ "Defining Social Norms and Related Concepts" (<https://www.unicef.org/media/111061/file/Social-norms-definitions-2021.pdf>)

about being physically alone, but it also impacts our spiritual life and mental wellbeing. We see this in 1 Peter 5:8, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”.

Lions hunt by separating an individual from the herd, cutting it off from safety and support. Once isolated, the prey becomes vulnerable and overwhelmed. In a similar spiritual sense, The Satan is believed to work by isolating people—seeking to influence their thoughts and gain a foothold in their lives. From there, the goal is to lead them toward self-destructive behaviors, often by amplifying feelings of shame, guilt, and failure.

The purpose of this book is to remind you that God sees you—you are never alone. Your life has meaning, you are deeply loved, and you were created with a purpose, even in a broken world. There are people who care about you and want to help you find **HOPE**. We are reminded in 1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV), “*But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his*

appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'."

Even though you may feel like society has rejected you or you feel you don't fit in because you don't fit the "Social Norms" established by your society, God sees your heart and you may be that unseen vessel full of life God is wanting to use to tell His story.