NAVIGATING THE NARRATIVES THROUGH RABBIT WARRENS: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO THE IDEOLOGIES OF THE TIME

By Mark Naylor, DTh

Introduction: Spirits of the Age

In every era and society, ideologies, philosophies, and narratives—what Peter L. Berger (1967, 45) calls "plausibility structures," and Charles Taylor (2007, 171) refers to as "the social imaginary"—shape and guide people's beliefs, values and behaviors. This article uses "narrative" to refer to a guiding story that a community embodies, lives in faithful alignment with, and uses to discern and reject competing stories.

The gospel is one such narrative, and from the first century it has been in ongoing contest with alternative plausibility structures. That conflict continues today. In the West, people are surrounded by powerful ideologies promoted through media and cultural institutions as both plausible and compelling. Because Christianity is no longer the dominant framework, believers often struggle to navigate competing narratives and the challenges of living in an environment that can at times feel hostile while maintaining fidelity to their faith amid pressures to conform.

The apostle Paul warns that the struggle is "not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12, NRSV). One manifestation of these "spirits of the age" is the dominant narratives and plausibility structures of the contemporary time—the understandings of reality that shape imagination, behavior and desire. These narratives are a rejection of God's redemptive story; other gods now demand allegiance. Yet if these narratives are not aligned with God's truth, they lead to death. They may appear attractive, promising light and happiness, but their path ends in destruction.

This is not merely a feature of the present age; it is the story of humanity since the garden—the continual pursuit of alternative philosophies that promise life, and the worship of other gods who appear more tangible or advantageous. Cultural pressures make these competing narratives seem more true, kind, just and beneficial than the boundaries and purposes God has established for the world he created.

Yet in at least one significant way, the contemporary context is unique. Joe Carter (2025) observes that the rapid and widespread distribution of narrative through modern media drastically amplifies its influence:

The power isn't just in how it might influence you personally but the fact that you know millions of others watched the same portrayal. You know that *they* know, and they know that *you* know. This shared awareness creates a powerful network effect that amplifies the message far beyond its initial impact.... This shared understanding creates an unspoken social consensus... precisely because everyone knows everyone else has heard it, reinforcing individualistic values.

These narratives are the "spirits" that believers are called to test: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 Jn 4:1, NRSV). How can Christians discern and respond faithfully to the dominant narratives of their time? This article describes conceptual tools and images that expose the narratives shaping the Western imagination and proposes ways to navigate them with integrity as followers of Jesus.

The Emergence of Western Narratives

Carl R. Trueman observes that the dominant narratives of the time did not suddenly emerge from nowhere. For those old enough to have grandchildren, the shift may feel rapid and surprising because today's assumptions stand in sharp contrast to what was widely believed 50—or even 30—years ago. In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* Trueman (2020, 105-128) traces the foundations of the "modern self," now functioning as the prevailing plausibility structure, back to the eighteenth century philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau redirected focus away from the Augustinian conviction that the self is corrupted internally by sin, toward the belief that the self is inherently good and only corrupted by "external forces" (2020, 111).

Shelley, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (2020, chapters 4-6) further shaped the trajectory toward rejecting external forces—such as religion—that are perceived as corrupting or oppressing the human self. The conviction that true freedom comes from removing artificial constraints grew increasingly persuasive. In the contemporary context, this plausibility structure asserts that ultimate reality is grounded not in the material world nor in a transcendent God who orders creation,

but in the internal self that determines what is true and real. A person's identity is thus formed primarily by personal convictions rather than by external social norms or divine authority. The world has, in effect, been turned upside down.

Identifying the Narratives: Root's "Secular Mysticisms"

This article is based on a course I taught which explored how followers of Jesus can understand and navigate the dominant narratives shaping contemporary culture. The course was based on Andrew Root's (2023) critique of "secular mysticisms"—contemporary spiritual trends that seek personal transformation without reference to God. Rather than looking beyond themselves to a transcendent reality, these narratives locate meaning and fulfillment in what Root (2023, 28) calls the "magnificence" of the "performing self."

Root identifies two dominant expressions of the "magnificent self" narrative in Western culture. The first is the *Pathway of Heroic Action*, which emphasizes self-empowerment, achievement, and the drive to overcome and control. The second is the *Pathway of Inner Genius*, which centers on discovering one's true identity within—ultimate reality is found in the self. Although these mysticisms share the conviction that the self is the source of transformation, they are often in tension with one another. The *Pathway of Heroic Action* aligns with the modernist ideal of rational mastery and order, while the *Pathway of Inner Genius* embodies the postmodern celebration of self-expression and personal authenticity.

Root (2023, 10-13) describes these competing narratives as "the hound dog of reason" and "the terrier of the expressive self," constantly barking at each other. The former demands an orderly, rational world, while the latter proclaims that "everyone has their own truth."

Christians can appreciate these "dogs" of reason and self-expression—provided they remain under the right authority like a well-trained dog that responds to its master's lead. Reason and desire can be good gifts when they are exercised under God's direction. Under his oversight, they operate within healthy boundaries and contribute to fruitfulness, fulfillment, and human flourishing. But when they escape from the master's control, they can become feral, unrestrained, and ultimately destructive.

Root (2023, 86-96) adds a third mystical pathway, completing a triangle of competing narratives. The *Beyonders* category is one of confession and surrender to a transcendent reality and contrasts both the *Pathway of Heroic Action* and the *Pathway of Inner Genius* because it looks for divine intervention beyond human limitations. Although the Christian worldview can fit into this category, it should not be unreservedly identified with it. Like the other two narratives, *Beyonders* is grounded in individualism. Its scope and authenticity is derived from individual experience, rather than from external, authoritative, communal or relational frameworks, such as biblical revelation or ecclesial institutions.

Moreover, this pathway is not primarily a metaphysical or theological claim (2023, 91). Instead, it focuses on moving beyond "exclusive human flourishing" and beyond "the assumption inside the everyday that there is nothing beyond death" (2023, 92) toward a personal, mystical experience of the divine.

The transcendent view is still secular if it does not become communal. It is less than Jesus' vision which is one of sacrifice for others, which cannot be reduce0d to an individual self-focused salvation and relationship with God. To illustrate how an individualist or self-focused *Beyonders* narrative falls short of the Christian communal plausibility structure, compare it to Abram Van Engen's (2024, 176) insight:

'In the beginning was the Word' (John 1:1). And the beginning also came by word. God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light (Gen. 1:3). In this use of language, the story of creation starts all of reality in an act of relation. For all language—spoken, written, or otherwise employed—comes from relationship and creates a new community. Language does not develop in a vacuum. Isolation can never add a single word to our vocabulary. Instead, every word signals the presence of others, some relation to another. Words go between and among. They communicate and connect. And in the process, they create.

Because the Christian narrative begins with transcendent reality and results in inner healing, it belongs in the *Beyonder* category. However, the Christian narrative encompasses far more than a hurting individual finding purpose and healing as the final *telos* of the encounter. Instead, Christians are called to embrace all the implications of being a community living under God within his Kingdom. What they embrace is more than a personal healing; it also involves the *denial* of the self that

demands pre-eminence. In its place, they embrace the identity, design and purpose that comes from God, because they represent him as his people. This is the meaning of the Lord's supper: Christians are God's people and they celebrate that reality in community, not in isolation, as a reminder of their *communal* covenant with God.

Illustrating the Narratives through Rabbit Warrens

During my preparation for the course, I was impressed with Stanley Hauerwas' (1981) analysis of Richard Adam's (1972) *Watership Down* in the essay "A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*."[1] Hauerwas (1981, loc 320) argues that *Watership Down* is "fundamentally a political novel... concerned with exploring what conditions are necessary for a community to be a viable polity." He examines the sociological significance of the various warrens in Adam's story, and his interpretation illuminates the plausibility structures of our time in ways that closely parallel Root's description of secular mysticisms. Much of what follows builds on the insights of both Hauerwas and Root, using Hauerwas' framework to extend the theological significance of *Watership Down*.

Spoiler alert: The following discussion contains key plot details from *Watership Down*.

Each warren introduced in Adam's novel represents a communal response to the sacred myths of the rabbits (described below)—either embracing them (Hazel's warren on Watership Down) or departing from them in various ways (Sandleford, Cowslip's, and Efrafa)[2]. As we examine these warrens, connections to contemporary narratives will be highlighted and, where appropriate, Root's insights into secular mysticisms will help clarify the modern parallels.

The Rabbits' Sacred Myths

The book *Watership Down* tells the story of a group of rabbits who are anthropomorphized with compelling human traits. They set out on a perilous journey to establish a safe warren. It is a classic adventure story—rich with danger, courage, and wisdom—that I first read to my children and, years later, to my

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[1] This was included as a chapter in Hauerwas' book, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

[2] The domesticized hutch rabbits of Nuthanger farm, chapters 24-25 could also be included here. Trapped by other gods (farmers), they have a stilted and narrow view of life. Hazel is the evangelist (images of the apostle Paul?), who calls them to the risk and freedom of true rabbit life.

grandchildren. The rabbits have a mythology, a guiding narrative that gives meaning and purpose to their lives, frequently referenced throughout the book. The heroes—Hazel, Fiver and the band of rabbits that follow them—find success as they remain faithful to the stories of El-ahrairah and Frith. El-ahrairah, the "prince with a thousand enemies," functions as a typological blend of biblical Adam, David and Jesus. As the first rabbit created by Frith (the sun), El-ahrairah is both the source and the lord of the rabbit kingdom, and the redeemer of his descendants.

Danger arises when rabbits abandon this defining myth of El-ahrairah and Frith, the call to courageously face "the thousand enemies." Instead, they embrace other narratives that seem attractive yet lead to death. True flourishing in the form of a healthy community can only be established by conforming to the vision of El-ahrairah and Frith. Hazel and Fiver exhibit a posture of confession and faith: confession of the inherent vulnerability of rabbits, and trustful risk-taking in obedience to the mystic vision. They abandon security, believing that facing the unknown is the only way to wholeness because this is not only the pattern exemplified in their sacred stories, but also the prophetic message of Frith communicated through the seer, Fiver. The will of Frith is knowable and must be followed if life is to have meaning and purpose.

The rabbits' myths have parallels in the biblical story, notably in the stories of Abraham and Jesus. Abraham is called to leave the comfort of daily existence, step into the unknown and look for the adventure found in the call of God. Jesus steps into the world as a human being and initiates the invitation to enter the Kingdom of God, a call that supersedes every other worldly pursuit. The reason for this call is that the narrow path, a sacrificial call to abandon all and follow leads to life, while the broad path, narratives that promise security and peace apart from God, leads to destruction (Mt 7:13,14).

The message for today is that commitment to the divine call requires singular loyalty because there are many competing narratives that tempt people from the path of life with promises of security, happiness and fulfillment.

The Complacency Narrative

Hazel and Fiver's home warren is Sandleford, a large, stable community that has existed for generations. When Fiver, the seer, experiences a premonition of disaster, his fears are triggered by a sign posted nearby by humans. Although the rabbits

cannot read it, the narrator informs the reader that the sign announces a future housing development on the land, confirming the accuracy of Fiver's intuition. Hazel and Fiver approach the Chief Rabbit to urge the warren to leave and establish a new settlement; however, he dismisses their warning and chooses apparent security over the disruption that relocation would bring. Only a small group joins Hazel and Fiver, accepting the vision and embracing the risk of leaving a comfortable, familiar environment for an unknown future.

Sandleford warren can be compared to the institutionalization of religion. The leaders are distracted by the need to maintain order and unity on the inside; they cannot read the signs of an external threat. Although the sacred myths are honored, they no longer function as the driving vision of the community. They are pleasant stories for the does to teach to their kittens, rather than catalysts for courageous action. Prophetic calls to mission, especially those requiring disruption or sacrifice, are stifled. Comfort and safety have bred complacency, and the summons to adventure and risk falls on deaf ears. "In fact its history had become its fate; it was no longer able to use tradition to remain open to the gifts and dangers of rabbit existence" (Hauerwas 2023, loc. 423).

In relation to contemporary plausibility structures, the issue is not outright rejection of the sacred myths but a contentment that has dulled the community's sensitivity to their relevance. As a result, they cannot see the looming threat. When disaster comes, the community is unprepared and unable to respond.

Sandleford can serve as a sobering metaphor for Western churches today. They are communities that still acknowledge the gospel message and participate in well-worn rituals yet rarely engage sacrificially in the risky mission that once motivated their forefathers. Dominant cultural ideologies urge believers to keep their faith private, discouraging public witness or actions that might provoke criticism or jeopardize social standing or employment.

Cowslip's Warren: The *Pathway of Inner Genius*

As they travel, Hazel and his band of rabbits are invited inside Cowslip's warren. Despite the apparent health of the rabbits and the abundant food, there are fewer rabbits than expected and they act oddly. It seems less like a community and more like a gathering of disinterested individuals. They avoid asking where another rabbit is. There is no thought of the future only the pleasures of the moment, of comfort

and personal security. Rejecting the stories of El-ahrairah's risk and courage, they instead create poetry that is centered on the brevity of life and acceptance of extinction. They validate themselves by embracing the brevity of their own lives and living in a carefree manner with little concern about their enemies.

Eventually Fiver, the seer, who sensed early on that "there's something unnatural and evil twisted all around this place" (Adams 1971, 99) realizes the truth: a man fed and protected the rabbits so they wouldn't want to leave. But his price was to set snares whenever he wanted. The rabbits "pretended that all was well, for the food was good, they were protected, they had nothing to fear but the one fear; and that struck here and there, never enough to drive them away. They forgot the ways of wild rabbits" (1971, 125).

The Cowslip warren had lost the identity of the stories of El-ahrairah and Frith and substituted mystical reflections that accepted their situation without a sense of future or purpose. They glorified their victimhood through poetry that spoke of the magnificence of death and submission to fate. Their identity parallels Root's *Pathway of Inner Genius* with a focus on the magnificence of the self. There is a hidden guilt, a denial of what they have abandoned so that they can justify and find some significance in their acquiescence to the inevitable.

To illustrate the *Pathway of Inner Genius*, Root (2023, 52-53) cites a memoir by Julie Yip-Williams called *The Unwinding of a Miracle* where she confronts her mortality in the face of late-stage colon cancer. In the fight for her life, she battles strenuously yet beautifully and honestly, as she searches for some meaning to her disease. Ultimately, she dies and "like the mystics, she walks a path into liminality [an in between state that is unresolved]. Her cancer forces her into a new space where she must face the deepest questions of existence." She was on "a journey where loss and surrender [to the inevitable death] were central" (2023, 72). This narrative desperately looks inside the self—the inner genius—for the answers to existence.

Efrafa: The *Pathway of Heroic Action*

The Efrafa warren led by a powerful rabbit called General Woundwort provides an illustration of Root's *Pathway of Heroic Action* which focuses on self-empowerment and control to overcome obstacles and bring change and purpose. Efrafa is a warren in which severe control in a tyrannical political society provides safety and security by

sacrificing freedom and risk. Safety by reducing risk is a key theme. General Woundwort is a tyrant and his council of rabbits controls the animals' lives to provide security. Rabbits receive "marks" that determine when they can go outside, who they can visit, and when they can mate. Woundwort transcends what it means to be a rabbit; he is magnificent because he overcomes and brings all things under his control.

In this tightly controlled environment the stories of risk and courage of El-ahrairah are rejected; those in charge ensure sufficiency and ongoing existence through control and rules, not through transcendent stories and visions. Here, poetry is used in secret by those does trapped in a situation where they cannot have kittens and so live with despair.

Efrafa represents those governing powers that refuse to acknowledge the creator God who desires multiplication and fruitfulness. Instead of facilitating environments where people can take courageous risks and flourish, they control and dominate resulting in a culture of death. The leaders are totalitarian with the conviction that their ideology is unassailable.

Root draws on a number of memoirs to illustrate the *Pathway of Heroic Action*. For example, in *Educated*, Tara Westover describes herself as a woman who overcomes a restrictive and difficult upbringing through education. Root shows how these memoirs often embody the *Heroic Action* pathway. According to Root, the authors of these memoirs are individuals who

- Seek "hidden magnificent power to be able to face what comes" (2023, 121).
- "In Nietzschean style," impose their will to power without apology (2023, 122).
- Strive to make themselves magnificent as they pursue their vocation (2023, 123).
- Embrace a transforming mysticism that does not depend on God, prioritizing personal talent and sacrificing all else for its fulfillment (2023, 124).
- Exhibit a heroic sense of personal dignity in the face of adversity, including suffering and illness (2023, 126).

- Reshape their inner identity by discovering and expressing their unique genius (2023, 127).
- Experience "euphoria" and a sense of "moral depth" through the conviction that pursuing their own magnificence is "the right thing to do," a "mystical pathway" oriented toward self-empowerment (2023, 128).
- Believe that this power is not received from "beyond" but emerges from within, through "unearthing the self's own magnificence" (2023, 130).

Testing the Spirits

Root and Trueman help us identify the "spirits" or dominant narratives of our time by asking: *Where do these narratives come from? What are they claiming? What are they assuming? How do those assumptions align with what God has revealed about himself, humanity, and the purpose of life—and how do they fail to do so?*

Once the spirits and powers at work are recognized within the plausibility structures of the age, the Christian calling is to "test the spirits" (1 Jn 4:1). As Sarah Coakley explains in her essay, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, cited in Root (2023, 87–88), this means "putting desire for God above all other desires and... judging human desires only in that light." Testing the spirits therefore begins with proper orientation toward God. As Root (2023, 216) emphasizes, that orientation is one of confession and surrender:

Confession and surrender open the self to be in a state of reception. Confession and surrender position the self to seek what is outside the self to meet the self where the self is up against impossibility and brokenness.... Only in a life of reception can the immanent frame be opened and the self made attentive to the arriving of revelation.

Root (2023, 208) also offers a compelling response to the modern complaint about the "hiddenness of God," exposing the hubris involved in demanding that God submit to our rational criteria so that we may decide whether to believe. The call of the gospel is not to evaluate God from a position of mastery, but to surrender to the transcendent and confess our "un-magnificence." In surrender Christians receive, and in receiving they are drawn beyond the limits of themselves—beyond their pain, their sin, and their self-focus.

They arrive at the cross of Christ, and to the ultimate act of self-giving and surrender. As Root writes, "There is no earning or contemplating our way to transformation, no do-it-yourself spirituality, for the salvation of God arrives when we receive God's ministry of life inside our death" (Root 2023, 217). It is the mystery of God's transcendence entering into their death that brings them into life as they surrender themselves to God in Christ.

Only with this posture of confession and surrender are Christians able to take up the mandate to test the spirits. From such a stance, several commitments follow. First, recognize the power of the prevailing plausibility structures. Argument or appeals to the past alone cannot overturn them, because they are sustained by centuries of philosophical and cultural formation. The narrative of the "magnificent self," which undermines institutions such as family, religion, and community, is the historical fruit of *long-standing movements away from God*.

Second, articulate a Christian anthropology. The identity of Christ followers must be grounded in creation, fall, redemption, and resurrection, not in autonomous individualism. This vision must be expressed not only in church teaching but in the everyday lives of believers.

Third, live out this anthropology in faithful communities. Countercultural, interdependent communities offer a more compelling vision of human flourishing than abstract argument alone. The strongest argument for marriage, for example, is not theory but the lived witness of stable, loving, and faithful families.

Fourth, refuse to concede the ground of identity. Christians must resist narratives that tell people to look inward for ultimate meaning or courage. Their speech and teaching should be rooted in a moral and spiritual framework given by God.

Fifth, compare cultural narratives with the biblical story. Scripture reveals God's will, character, and mission. When contrasted with the stories promoted by media and social platforms, the differences become clear. The biblical story is shown to be a path to sanity and life, while the spirit of the age—even though it looks powerful—will fade and die along with its proponents.

Sixth, embrace the risky call of the *missio Dei*. Faithfulness requires moving beyond comfort and complacency. Though following Christ into the storm feels precarious,

it is ultimately more secure and permanent than the false safety offered by cultural conformity.

An Example: facing the Abortion Narrative as a Christian *beyonder*

The abortion debate illustrates the difference between arguing over surface values and testing the underlying spirits. Typically, conversations proceed as follows. A "pro-life" advocate argues that the fetus is human and therefore deserves protection and should have rights. A "pro-choice" advocate replies either that the fetus is not human or that a woman's autonomy overrides any competing claim. These exchanges rarely lead anywhere because both sides assume a shared moral framework that does not exist. What is needed instead is a deeper examination of the distinct narratives and mysticisms that shape these moral claims. In doing so, Christians gain greater insight into the other's perspective and create space to bear witness to their own commitment to follow Christ.

At this deeper level, distinct orientations become visible:

- The Christian ***beyonder*** looks to transcendent authority, affirms the sacredness of human life as God's creation and adopts a posture of submission to God's will.
- The ***heroic agent*** (counter-Enlightenment) prioritizes power and control; anything that interferes with personal goals may be removed, and such removal can be framed as an act of liberation.
- The ***inner-genius self*** (exclusive humanism) locates meaning and authority within the self; consequently, the fetus is not regarded as human until and unless personhood is granted by that self.

A Dialogue on Abortion with ABC

One helpful approach to dialogue is the ABC method—**Agree, Build, Contrast** (Patterson et al. 2022, 224–228). Rather than beginning with difference, this method begins with common ground. By starting with "agree," Christ followers seek areas of shared concern, acknowledge the other person's perspective, and even assist them in articulating their position clearly and fairly.

The second step, "build," aims at deeper understanding. Through thoughtful questions, they explore the underlying concerns, experiences, and assumptions

shaping the person's view. At this stage, more nuanced issues emerge—revealing both areas of agreement and points of divergence.

Finally, "contrast" allows differences to be expressed without hostility. Rather than framing disagreement as "you are wrong," contrast presents it as "we see things differently." This fosters a posture of standing side by side, comparing perspectives, rather than confronting one another as adversaries.

Consider a common statement in the abortion discussion: "Women have the right over their own bodies and should be free to choose whether or not to have a baby. They are harmed when they are denied access to abortion. Abortion is a human right."

For the Christian *beyonder*, agreement can begin with a shared concern for the well-being of women. There is a common desire to protect vulnerable women from harm, to affirm their dignity, and to resist any form of marginalization or devaluation. Christians can also affirm the importance of supporting women as they face difficult and often painful circumstances.

In the "build" stage, the conversation can develop through exploring the deeper human realities and lived experiences that surround such a decision, such as:

- Personal realities: Do you know someone who has faced this decision? What was that experience like?
- Emotional and social pressures: What challenges or fears might a woman experience in an unwanted pregnancy? What options does she perceive as available?
- Exploring alternatives: What might it look like to support a woman if she chose to carry the child to term? What kinds of resources or community support would be needed?

It is in the "contrast" stage that the deeper theological and philosophical differences come into focus. How do Christians determine what is truly best for an expectant mother? What is the foundation for deciding the right course of action?

Within the framework of the heroic agent, the emphasis on autonomy and control means that anything hindering personal goals may be removed without moral

concern. Similarly, the **inner-genius self** locates authority within the individual, so the fetus is not recognized as fully human unless personhood is granted by the mother.

In contrast, the Christian ***beyonder*** locates meaning and moral authority in the purposes of a transcendent Father. From this perspective, pregnancy is not merely a personal circumstance but a sacred trust. Both the woman and the unborn child are created in the image of God and are therefore worthy of dignity, protection, and care. Motherhood itself is understood not as a burden imposed from outside, but as a profound gift that participates in God's life-giving work.

Because God is Father over all, both mother and child fall under his care. The call, therefore, is not to choose one life over another, but to seek ways in which both may be protected and nurtured within a community of love and support.

Conclusion

As they engage in conversations that reveal the underlying narratives and worldviews shaping moral decisions, Christians are not called to respond with force or self-assertion. Instead, they imitate Christ—living in surrender, dying to self, and offering themselves in love so that others may live.

Jesus did not conform to the dominant narratives of his time, nor did he seek to overcome them through force. Rather, he submitted himself fully to the will of the Father—a truly ***beyonder*** orientation. In following him, believers speak truth without compromise, extend compassion to those who are hurting, and entrust judgment to God. God alone holds ultimate authority, and all people are accountable to him. It is God—not us—who will ultimately judge, defeat evil, and restore what is broken.

Like Hazel and Fiver in *Watership Down*, people live by the stories and communal traditions that shape their identity. Christians embrace the revelation of God's will, character, and mission. Through confession and submission, they embody the story of the cross—a story of self-giving love and redemptive sacrifice that remains faithful to the Christian ***beyonder*** narrative without compromise.

Mark Naylor is the Coordinator of International Leadership Development (CILD) for Northwest Baptist Seminary and Fellowship International. He holds a DTh in Missiology from UNISA with a focus on intercultural communication. He has spent over 30 years in Bible translation into the Sindhi language and teaches courses on cultural sensitivity and contextualized communication.

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