

Research as Worship

STUDY GUIDE | ISSUE 02

SOPHIA:
Cultivating Redemptive Influence
in Pluralistic Universities

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By Martine Audéoud

Study Guide • Issue 2 • July 2024

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‘All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ.’
Colossians 2:3

Published by the Society of Christian Scholars



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'The image reflects the triune God engaging all his creation in love for its flourishing.'

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The *SOPHIA Study Guide Series* explores ideas, themes, and practices to equip Christian academics in pluralistic universities for redemptive influence among students, colleagues, and the various disciplines of the academy. By nurturing the competencies, capacities, and characteristics discussed in these guides, we hope users will transform their teaching, research, and service in ways that reflect the mind of Christ in their cultural contexts. Such efforts not only reveal God's wisdom but participate in God's redemptive and liberative purposes for the university and society.

What might it mean to serve as Christian academics in a pluralistic university?

Christian academics desire to live out the Christian faith, grow in Christlikeness, practice spiritual disciplines, and evidence the fruit of the Spirit. As part of the community of faith, they seek to further their knowledge of the Scriptures, being guided by the Church's great tradition. As such, they affirm and embody the historic Christian faith, found in such biblical summations as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

Christian **academics** delight in the learned life. They love the pursuit, acquisition, and dissemination of knowledge, and they carry out this work with excellence. They are committed to the noblest aims of the academy: discovering, cultivating, and advancing truth, goodness, and beauty. In doing so, Christian academics promote wisdom oriented to God's glory, and their dedication to God is reflected in their inspired teaching, imaginative research, and humble service.

How might Christian academics love God and neighbour in a pluralistic university context?

While there are many possibilities, Christian academics should consider how to have **redemptive influence** among students, colleagues, and their academic disciplines as a way to love God and neighbour. Such influence seeks change oriented towards the reconciling and liberative purposes of the *missio Dei* (God's mission in the world). By doing so, Christian academics witness to the human flourishing found in God's kingdom.

Human flourishing is inextricably bound up with God's presence. It is characterized in the Scripture as *shalom* (Jer. 29:4-7) and blessedness (Mt. 5:1-16). Such notions are not experienced in their fulness in this fallen world, but are tasted in Christ as Christian academics seek to renew, reclaim, and (re)create the good, the true, and the beautiful in the pluralistic university context. As such, we encounter the awe, wonder, and delight of creation while longing for and seeking its restoration (Col. 1:19-20).

Overarching Themes

Our study guides are designed to elaborate on the mission described above and to provoke thought, encourage action, and lead to transformations in teaching, research, and administration. They are organized around five overarching themes:

1. Integration of Faith and Scholarship
2. Spiritual Formation
3. Interaction with Cultures and Society
4. Pursuit of Vocational Excellence
5. Relational and Leader Development

Integration of Faith and Scholarship

The integration of faith and scholarship is the process by which Christian academics from every discipline seek to discern how ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ’ (Col. 2:3). Integration is about discerning how various aspects and concepts of particular academic disciplines hold together, not only within their respective academic fields but across academic disciplines. This happens through a dialogical process with God, ourselves, others, and the world.

Study guides under this theme seek to bring a living faith, grounded in biblical and theological resources, to bear on the assumptions, practices, and purposes of various academic disciplines while exploring how our academic disciplines might shape our understanding of God, the world, ourselves, and others.

Spiritual Formation

Christian academics recognize the intertwining of scholarship with the spiritual life. They know that the fruit of the Spirit is essential to their vocation. Because the pluralistic university is filled with countervailing ideologies and idols, Christian scholars must be attuned to the Holy Spirit so that they can discern what is true and resist what is not (Phil. 4:8-9). Practicing spiritual disciplines in community with other Christ-followers refreshes and sturdies the soul.

Study guides under this theme explore the ways in which the habits of spiritual disciplines inform our scholarly practices. These study guides open conversations about how to nurture the fruit of the Spirit in our teaching, research, and service in our institutions and communities. They also reinforce the communal nature of the spiritual journey as opposed to isolation, as we bear one another’s burdens.

Interacting with Cultures and Society

If Christian scholars are to engage cultures effectively with humility, boldness, and sensitivity, attaining a measure of socio-cultural understanding, whether of one's home or host culture(s), is crucial. Acquiring such understanding is no easy task. It takes time, patient study, keen observation, and humble listening to God and others.

Study guides under this theme examine communication strategies and how to create 'thick', interdisciplinary descriptions so as to locate human actions and cultural artefacts within broader socio-cultural narratives and contexts, and ultimately within the biblical context. Socio-cultural understanding is essential to make possible loving, culturally appropriate interactions with students, colleagues, and communities.

Vocational Excellence in Teaching, Research, and Service

Christian academics pursue vocational excellence so as to bring God's wisdom to bear in the pluralistic university. These vocational efforts seek to weave *shalom* into their teaching, research, and service so that God is glorified in human beings who are fully alive (Jn 10:10). All work that lifts up, liberates, and empowers humanity is understood to be of value and worth, bringing dignity to the work and the worker.

Study guides under this theme explore the habits, practices, and virtues needed for vocational excellence, including a variety of approaches to weaving biblical truth into syllabi, philosophies of education, research agendas, university-community relationships, and other aspects of university life.

Relational and Leader Development

Christian academics are relationally attuned to others and are ready to serve as leaders in their universities. Being attuned to others requires, first, an understanding of self that is rooted in the knowledge of God and in growing relationships with others. To lead others effectively, one must first understand how to discipline and lead oneself.

Study guides under this theme investigate the triad of God-self-others in the world and how these relationships lead to wisdom. Such wisdom is crucial for engaging the university community with truth and love, whether in personal evangelism, the classroom, service to colleagues, or one's local socio-cultural context.

How to Use the Society's Study Guides

These guides are not intended to be read in one sitting. They should be treated more like Bible devotionals – read a relatively short passage and then reflect or meditate on it over the next day or two. If you decide to use the study guides individually, you can read sections on a daily or weekly basis, allowing for reflection during the week and perhaps even incorporation into your academic practices. Consider keeping a journal or writing a blog on how God is transforming you for redemptive influence in the university context.

If you decide to meet with a small group, perhaps monthly, the study guides can provoke insightful conversations through which you can share and encourage others, either orally during the meeting or in writing afterwards. If you're leading the small group, consider the following steps:

1. Prepare before the meeting by praying and studying the material.
2. Be hospitable, welcoming, and open to new ideas.
3. Listen to the group and allow everyone to participate if they so choose.
4. Stay in contact with group members. Become a learning community where you can grow and support each other.

The study guides might also be useful in workshops, seminars, or retreat settings where Christian academics have set aside several hours for intense discussion and reflection. They may be helpful in generating academic conference themes and ideas, or they could be used in small-group discussions to explore the conference themes in greater depth.

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Note: To explore this approach in more depth, see my *Research as Worship in the Company of God*. World Evangelical Alliance (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023), upon which this study guide is based.

Part 1:
Can Research be a Way to
Worship God?

To begin, reflect upon the last time you truly worshipped the Lord. What happened? When did it happen? What did you sense in the midst of this worshipful experience? Write down some of your thoughts, emotions, and details that come to mind.

Read Hebrews 10:19–25 slowly and several times.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:19–25, NIV)

These verses express the privilege we Christians have as we are invited to enter freely into the presence of our awesome God. Have you considered that this privilege also extends to our research as Christian researchers when we seek to discover more of God's truth, goodness, and beauty?

The joy of doing research stems from our deepest desire to know God and his good creation more and more. This desire is at the core of our motivation to do research.

Drawing inspiration from the previous passage, this study guide will use the tabernacle or temple not only as a metaphor but also as a way of describing the task of research by Christian academics as an offering of worship to God at each stage of the research process.

To frame our reflections on research in reference to the Bible passage quoted above, we must remember that sin is the main problem that must be resolved, because sin has kept all humanity from entering into and enjoying God's presence fully. Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his victorious resurrection, God made it possible to enter into his presence freely.

Research is, therefore, a response to an invitation to collaborate with God in his presence to (re)solve problems (created by sin) and discover the goodness of his creation.

We can liken this calling to the function of Moses, who led the Israelites through the desert and into God's presence to receive his wisdom so that we could commune and communicate with him while being in community with one another.

So *can* we enter into God's presence by doing research? The overwhelming response is ... YES!!!

Reflection: How do these verses speak to you? In what ways do they encourage you to develop a life of worship in God's presence? Take time now before the Lord and search your heart. What are the deepest motives of your heart as you anticipate conducting your research? Do you merely want to earn a diploma, or do you really want to partner with God in his mission and worship him through your research? Read Psalm 139 and write down some of your thoughts and prayers. What is the focus or theme of your research?

How can Research be an Integral Part of Our Relationship with God?

Most contemporary frameworks and literature regarding research are rooted in the thought of Western cultures and have been framed by Greco-Roman philosophies and worldviews. With this in mind, I invite Christian researchers to consider research frameworks from non-Western cultures that usually endorse a more integrative, holistic and systemic approach to life and, consequently, to research.

Drawing from my extensive experience in African cultures, the African worldview considers life as an interconnected whole where spirituality infuses all spheres of life, including our so-called work life.

Life is an integrated whole in which spirituality and spiritual relationships are a full part of our thinking and doing. Similarly, I maintain that research should also be viewed as integrated and embedded in the researcher's relationship with and the divine activity of the triune God—what an elevated purpose for research! From this perspective, we must be attentive to God's invitation to approach him, the triune Creator, as a sacred endeavour to participate in his mission (*missio Dei*), to collaborate worshipfully with him in his divine activity at all levels. Ligunda Li-Ma makes this point clear:

'Research projects are not undertaken to just satisfy personal curiosity or for just an academic degree ... [but] in order to address an existential problem which relates to God's global and holistic mission.'¹

¹ Fohle Lygunda Li-Ma, *Transforming Missiology* (Carlisle, UK: Langham), 358.

Different cultures are expressed through different worldviews; but what is a worldview? For a brief overview, consider reading an essay by Greg McKenzie entitled ‘On Worldview’.²

Reflection: In what ways do you think that your culture and your worldview foster or hinder your understanding of the integration of your research efforts in the presence and worship of God?

Hebrews 10:19–22 outlines the central focus of a Christian researcher’s vocation—the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The act of conducting research as a response of love to God’s divine calling becomes possible solely because of Christ’s sacrificial love on the cross and glorious resurrection, thereby granting the researcher access to God’s holy presence.

It is within these sacred pursuits that researchers have the opportunity to unravel the mysteries of God’s creative and sustaining power in our world, whether their research unfolds in the domains of the social sciences, physics, or any other discipline. In this light, research itself becomes an act of worship, a deeply meaningful offering, a gift, and a sacred journey.

At the highest level, God invites you, the researcher, to come to him, the triune Creator of the universe, and join his mission (*missio Dei*) of redemption, reconciliation, and renewal. Consider reading the essay by Eddie Arthur, ‘Missio Dei and the Mission of the Church’, and reflecting further on the topic as to how research can be part of God’s mission to the world.³

As a Christian researcher, you are called as a member of the body of Christ to collaborate with God in the unfolding of his mission here on earth.

This unfolding takes place as you seek to understand even the smallest process or attempt to solve one specific problem in order to radiate God’s glory and magnificence on earth. Moving towards a fuller understanding of the ‘deeper things of God’ (1 Corinthians 2:10) is not limited, as we often think, to the so-called ‘spiritual things’! Your research is part of the ‘deep things’ that the Lord calls you to unfold! For this unfolding to take place, it is

² Greg McKenzie, ‘On Worldview’, [Scripture and Mission](#); accessed 10 April 2024. See also Issue 1 in this study guide series, ‘The Biblical Story and the Stories of Academic Disciplines’, which makes reference to the relationship of Scripture and worldview and how to engage our academic disciplines accordingly.

³ Eddie Arthur, ‘Missio Dei and the Mission of the Church’, [Wycliffe Global Alliance](#); accessed 10 April 2024.

vital that you move with each step of your research more and more into God's presence. Research and investigation are holy ground—a worshipful process—as you seek to enter into God's thoughts holistically to better understand them in order to collaborate in his creative work both locally and globally, while taking your own worldview and socio-cultural context into consideration.

What are the Three Qualities of Research Undertaken with God?

Research conducted in partnership with God encompasses the three qualities outlined in Hebrews 10:20, circumscribing a new path that researchers are urged to tread, a pathway that is new, living, and open.⁴

New

The process of advancing research goes beyond mere description of existing elements (although that might be a starting point for research). It also entails the creation or proposal of innovative methods, systems, theories, or approaches. Research is pursued to address issues that require innovative solutions. Just as Christians are urged to lead a life marked by renewed purpose, Christian researchers are encouraged to actively infuse their research with a spirit of renewal as an integral part of their devotion to God.

Living

The researcher steps into a vibrant path—an extraordinary reality! Everything that God invites the researcher to engage in is centred around life, around his breath of life. Research needs to be a source of vitality, breathing new life into old, unhealthy, destructive, and death-ridden paradigms. God's enduring work throughout history has been rooted in providing life as a response to the intrusion of sin and death into the world. Researchers are part of his redemptive response to a hurting world.

Open

Lanny Vincent states that in the company of God

'expanded potential is freshly awakened. Some call this hope. Others call it encouragement'.⁵

Christian researchers are thus encouraged to step onto a path characterized by openness. In collaboration with their creative God, boundless creativity is at the disposal of Christian

⁴ Martine Audéoud, *Research as Worship in the Company of God*, World Evangelical Alliance (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023), 21.

⁵ Lanny Vincent, *A Primer on Innovation Theology: Responding to Change in the Company of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 134.

researchers as he reveals, through his Holy Spirit, new pathways where none existed before. Do note that as we seek to enter into God’s presence, there is only one entrance—through the living, resurrected Christ! Entering into God’s presence through academic research is possible only because of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice on the cross and his victorious resurrection!

Reflection: What thoughts are triggered in you as you consider this new, living, and open path?

Reflection: In your personal journal, draw a picture or jot down an expression of the newness that you are thinking of as you consider your research. In what ways is the hoped-for newness triggering joy and motivating you to move on with your research?

Nehemiah’s Example

Although the Bible provides few examples of those who conduct research, Nehemiah is one such example. God called Nehemiah to transform a troublesome and vulnerable situation in Jerusalem that dishonoured God and left his people in distress. As he began his journey in answering God’s call as a transformational leader, Nehemiah first researched the dismal state of Jerusalem beyond the rumours he heard while in Babylon. For instance, he discovered the name of King Artaxerxes’s guard who oversaw the forest and was well positioned to ask the king to write a letter in his favour (Neh. 2:7). This kind of research offers a glimpse into a faith-integrated perspective. Take the time to read Nehemiah chapters 1–3. After reading, complete the table below as you seek to garner insights from Nehemiah as a researcher.

What does Nehemiah do as a researcher?	How could you follow his example?	Other comments?

Table 1: Nehemiah as a Researcher

Reflection: Can you find another example of a researcher in the Bible? Explain what you could learn from this example.

Reflection: At the beginning of this chapter, we asked the question, “Can doing research be a way to worship God?” How would you answer this question now?

Part 2 will introduce various elements needed to frame a God-centred, community-focused, worshipful research project. In doing so, we will use many elements of the Jewish worship processes in the tabernacle as metaphors that gesture importantly to Christ as the ‘once and for all sacrifice’ for the redemption, reconciliation, and renewal of God’s good creation.

Part 2:
What is the Problem?
Developing the Introductory
Research Chapter

Part 2 seeks to guide the development of the relevant elements of your introductory research chapter. As you embrace your research, you must reflect on various elements that will ensure the needed credibility and rigor. The elements mentioned in this chapter are not necessarily in the order required by your research institution. To begin, read Leviticus 16. You might be wondering: why Leviticus and how does it relate to developing my research problem?

Knowing Yourself

Before the Levitical high priest sought atonement for the people of God, he began with his own atonement. Similarly, research conducted as worship begins by claiming Christ's atoning work for yourself. This implies that you conduct a self-evaluation and assess what in your life might not align with God's purposes. Research is not exclusively an individual process; it also involves your family. As with the high priest, the whole family is involved and needs to be covered by the blood of Christ.

Reflection: Consider your life and that of your family. In what ways do you need to take the time for personal and family cleansing and healing? Are there elements in your personal life or in the life of your family that need to be removed, redirected, or reimagined? What about your time management and your commitments? What about the way your family will need to support you as you embark on your research? Write down some of your reflections on these (and other) questions or concerns that arise.

As you reflect on your strengths and weaknesses as well as those of your family, part of your responsibility will be to develop a stewardship process that weaves together your personal, familial, and research responsibilities. I highly encourage you to create a group of accountability partners, what I call the *Personal Learning Community*. Why do we need accountability partners as Christian researchers? Your accountability partners will help to ask the right questions, review your work, discuss your research processes and outcomes, and also pray for you, taking your life and work into the presence of God on your behalf.

In Exodus 17:12, we have a beautiful image of what this kind of stewardship and accountability might look like. Similar to the battle Joshua faced in the valley against the Amalekites, conducting research that brings God glory is a spiritual battle. And yet, on the top of the mountain, Aaron and Hur supported Moses' outstretched arms as spiritual intercessors in support of the Israelites who battled in the valley.

As Christian researchers, we need a team who will stretch out their arms on our behalf and intercede for us so that we can win the ongoing battle of conducting research in accord with God's purposes to bring redemption, reconciliation, and renewal day in and day out to God's good creation.

Reflection: Seek the Lord and develop a list of three to five accountability partners who can commit to praying for you daily as you develop your research, and who can offer advice as you move forward in the research process. ‘Victory is won through many advisers’ (Prov. 11:14, NIV).

Names of your accountability partners	In what ways can they help?

Table 2: Your Accountability Partners

Understanding Your Community

The second section in this chapter (Lev. 16:15ff.) deals with the atonement made for the sins of the Israelites. We don’t know what their specific sins were, but we can imagine that there were a multitude of them, from personal sins (like those of Aaron’s sons who didn’t worship God in the prescribed way in Leviticus 10) to sins performed within their communities (which we can easily imagine) and even in the management of their environment (we see that some animals should not be eaten, for instance). Aaron was the main person managing this atonement. He can also symbolize the role of researchers who, while learning to understand their communities’ processes and relationships, have developed a clearer understanding of the gaps where God’s *shalom* needs to be promoted or restored.⁶

Generally speaking, research is conducted within a specific community. To develop research that will be meaningful and relevant, learning about your specific target community and understanding its deeper focus, questions, and challenges are essential to the process.

I highly recommend conducting a context or worldview analysis that identifies specific connections between your research problem and the context and/or worldview assumptions germane to your research.

Take time to reflect on the communities your research will affect. Who are they? What are their worldviews, their histories, and their specificities? Bring them prayerfully to the Lord. Then write in your research journal a thorough description of the context of

⁶ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 33.

the communities you will serve through your research. To write up your contextual analysis, you may want to review the essay on worldview analysis suggested in Part 1 as well as the ‘Site and Context Guide’ used by the Welsh government to capture the value of a local community for community planning and the article by Andrew Anguko, ‘Application of Contextual Analysis to Evaluation Methodologies in Africa: The Case of Contribution Analysis’.⁷

After reviewing your notes from this process, integrate your analysis into the context section of the first chapter of your proposal.

What is Your Problem Statement?

As you recollect your reading in Leviticus 16, you will realize that any of the problems that your research will seek to solve are ultimately rooted in sin, i.e. elements that have been caused by the disruption brought about by humankind’s disobedience to God, as I suggest in my book:

Sin is indeed the main source of all the specific problems we identify here on earth, and more precisely the source of the problems that researchers seek to solve through their research. Researchers need to *specifically identify the main problem* they want to concentrate on. Christian researchers are called to identify that main problem *while centring on God’s perspective* on that problem in an incarnational way, much as the High Priest lived incarnationally with his people and listened to their pleas. The sacrifice brought by the High Priest represents Christ offering himself as an atonement for sin. It was the basis for a restored life and *shalom* between God and His people. I would propose that Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection represent the foundation of the solutions that researchers can look for so as to bring God’s *shalom* to problems that have been identified. Christ is our peace (Eph. 4:14). Research with God is rooted in this understanding and realization.⁸

Reflection: Take time to seek the Lord and bring the collection of your thoughts about what you have understood so far regarding the problem you believe he wants you to research. Then write down your answers to these questions:

- What is the problem?
- Why is it a problem?
- What is the significance of this problem?
- What is the evidence that shows there is a problem?
- What research has already been done regarding this problem or a similar one?

⁷ [Site and Context Analysis Guide: Capturing the Value of a Site](#), produced by the Design Commission for the Welsh Government. March 2016, accessed 10 April 2024; Andrew Anguko, ‘[Application of Contextual Analysis to Evaluation Methodologies in Africa: The Case of Contribution Analysis](#)’, eVALUation Matters, February 2020.

⁸ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 36.

As your reflection deepens on the problem you are considering, be encouraged by the promise of Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV): ‘Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.’ The High Priest Aaron may have felt overwhelmed by the litany of sins he confessed to the Lord as he laid his hands on the goat, but the hope of the atonement he received for the people of Israel sustained him.

As Christian researchers, we have a strong foundation because Christ is our great High Priest who has overcome death through his sacrifice and triumphant resurrection. So be encouraged!

What is Your Research Objective?

Clearly identifying and articulating your research objective connected to the problem you are trying to solve is crucial.

Just as the High Priest declared verbally and audibly the sins (problems) that needed to be solved, your purpose statement should clearly and concisely identify the meaning, depth, scope and goals of the intended research. It will constitute the general research objective of your study.⁹

Here is an example from my own dissertation: I intended to study ‘the impact of Christian leaders on their urban communities so that my readers may learn to become more effective transformational leaders in Islamic Francophone Africa.’ Having an excellent and clear research objective serves as a compass guiding you throughout your research. Now, write your own research objective. Read it aloud. Share and evaluate it with your Personal Learning Community.

Prayerfully, write your purpose statement in your research journal in less than forty words. Include these or similar elements: “I intend to study ... in order to discover... because I want to ...”

What is Your Main Research Question?

Your research purpose will enable you to articulate a clear research question. Your research question should flow from your research objective or purpose. It represents the focus of your research.

Write a concise primary research question that is congruent and aligned with your research purpose.

⁹ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 38.

What are Your Secondary Research Objectives and Questions?

Next, create your research objectives and secondary research questions. These objectives and questions are much more specific. They will serve as a guide as you develop the various stages of your research. To understand better how to manifest this process, consider how Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman at the well, using questions to probe her life context. Jesus' overall objective was to free the woman from her sinful life. To do so, he first led her to describe her situation and then to attend to the causes and consequences of her behaviour so that she would be ready to embrace what Jesus had to offer: living, life-giving water—himself!

To capture this process, I suggest creating a research matrix like the table below or perhaps a concept map that features the main research question and problem at the centre with secondary objectives and questions stemming from that centre. Keep your research focused by having one primary question and no more than three or four secondary questions. As you craft these questions, keep in mind that God's shalom and harmony should permeate all levels of our research.

Prayerfully, fill your own research matrix (below) with your research objectives and questions (primary and secondary). Review your research matrix with your Personal Learning Community and with your research supervisor. Pray over it. Make any changes that you, as a research team, deem necessary.

RESEARCH FOCUS	OBJECTIVE	QUESTION
Overall focus		
1st secondary		
2nd secondary		
3rd secondary		
4th secondary		

Table 3: Research Matrix

This research matrix is the backbone of your research. Print it out and post it over your work desk as a constant reminder of the direction of your research.

What is the Innovative Significance of Your Research?

As you develop your research focus, discover some of the 'secret things of God' (Deut. 29:28). What are these 'secret things' that the Lord will allow you to reveal through your research? In what ways will they be meaningful and relevant for the community that you seek to serve? How will your research extend the influence of God's *shalom* to the community that you seek to serve? These are crucial questions that will remind you of

your specific God-given call to do research. What a privilege to be chosen to reveal a part of God's glory, his truth, goodness, and beauty!

Reflection: Write down why the outcomes of your research will be significant for the community that you want to serve, including the ways it discloses one of the 'secrets' of God. Discuss it with your Personal Learning Community.

As you develop the framework for your research and ensure alignment with the various aspects of your research focus, keep in mind how your research will resonate within the framework of the institution with which you are doing your research. You may want to write down the core values of your institution and think about how your research will be aligned with them. The significance of your research will be enhanced by the harmony of your research with the institutional values of your research institution.

Reflection: Consider the core values of your university program. I suggest adding a column on the right of your research matrix with the heading 'Core Values' and then filling that column for each line. Is there an additional non-negotiable value that the Lord is bringing to your mind and that will be foundational to your research? Add it to your research matrix.

RESEARCH FOCUS	OBJECTIVE	QUESTION	CORE VALUES
Overall focus			
1st secondary			
2nd secondary			
3rd secondary			
4th secondary			

Table 4: Research Matrix 2

Next, ask the Lord to strengthen you to be faithful to these values, remembering 2 Tim. 2:15 (NIV) as you seek to unfold another ray of his glory through your research: 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.'

What are Your Assumptions and Worldviews?

As human beings, we are limited by our socio-cultural location, which shapes our frameworks and assumptions for understanding the world. In humility, Christian researchers need to realize that they have limited capacities due to these assumptions and worldviews that have shaped them up to this point. In the first chapter of this study guide, I trust you

have taken the time to reflect upon these assumptions and frameworks. Now, it is time to describe your worldview and how it will be shaping your research.

Reflection: Consider, prayerfully, the assumptions and worldviews you bring to your research and how they may affect your understanding. Write down your thoughts in your personal research journal. You may also want to draw a concept map or a table to point to the specific elements of your worldviews that will shape your research. Write a prayer that expresses your need for wisdom and humility as you proceed through this process.

What are the Delimitations and Limitations of Your Research?

In the same way as your assumptions and worldview shape your research, delimitations (e.g. geographic, content-specific) and limitations (e.g. access to resources, legal restrictions) will also shape your research project. In the metaphor of the tabernacle used in the first chapter, the geographic limitations of the holy spaces were clearly marked by walls, gates and veils. The delimitations in the tabernacle metaphor were expressed in who had access to the various holy spaces.

Reflection: Write down the delimitations and limitations of your research project. As you write, remember: ‘The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered’ (Proverbs 17:27).

This chapter has enabled you to gather some of the essential building blocks to begin your research. Throughout this process, you have constantly been reminded that the overall purpose of your research is to disclose some of the ‘secret’ glory of God, keeping in mind your finitude and the need to humbly acknowledge these limitations and delimitations. The next chapter will lead you to assess the foundations of your research—i.e. the body of literature that will provide the background for the focus of your research—while clarifying the gap the Lord has called you to fill through your research.

Part 3:
What are the Foundations
of Your Research Project?
Building the Literature
Review Chapter

As I discuss in greater detail in my book, *Research as Worship*, our integrity is vital to the research process.

To establish a solid foundation and credibility for your research, we will look at how integrity is woven into finding and referencing foundational academic sources. Then, we will reflect on different elements that are crucial to writing a valuable literature review that will anchor your research meaningfully while ensuring that the reader will realize how your new research brings added value to the body of research already available.¹⁰

As you gather background information regarding your research topic, it is important to build upon relevant and up-to-date research and reflective literature in order to provide your research with a sense of powerful, life-giving rationale, like water springing out of the earth. Relevant, current and foundational literature will give your research the robust life-giving grounding needed to give it credibility and relevancy.

A Frame for Worshipful Research

These reflections draw on the metaphor of the desert tabernacle to provide Christian researchers with a vivid and compelling framework to shape their research endeavours. In Hebrews 10:19–22, the epistle’s author references either the ancient desert tabernacle or the familiar Hebrew temple. These structures, symbolic of God’s call to worship, not only provide visual representations but also offer Christian researchers a rich framework to develop their research as an act of worship to God. To streamline our reflections, we will focus only on the tabernacle metaphor.



Figure 1: [Overall picture of the Tabernacle](#) (used by permission of Frederic Travier)

¹⁰ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 47.

The tabernacle was delineated with a white linen enclosure upheld by bronze pillars fastened with cords and hooks to ensure stability.

Likewise, researchers need to articulate how they will firmly anchor their research in the pertinent conceptual, historical, geographic, and culturally relevant frameworks germane to their research projects.

These frameworks serve to provide a strong cohesive structure to research before one considers the essential elements of the worshipful inquiry. As researchers construct their literature review, it is crucial for them to identify frameworks that will ensure cohesion throughout the entire research project. Much as the tabernacle's pillars had hooks that were securely anchored in the desert soil, the choice of frameworks is vital, especially in demanding contexts.

Furthermore, the tabernacle's construction was thoughtfully adapted to be sustainable in the harsh desert environment. The wall, with its pillars firmly anchored into the ground, provided a solidity that was indispensable in that environment. Similarly, research should be established and consistently conducted within the context of a specific worldview and embedded within a community. Frameworks are to be contextually relevant and congruent with the research setting and context; for example, one should not assume that Western conceptual frameworks necessarily apply to non-Western contexts.

Researchers are therefore encouraged to assess the suitability of their frameworks for the specific context of their research focus.

This scrutiny will unveil the distinctive facets of the research and how it contributes to the extension of God's shalom within the communities that the researcher seeks to serve.

How is Your Research Guarded?

In this section, we will examine some of the practical issues at stake regarding the stewardship of your literature sources. Such stewardship involves keeping track of where you found your sources, referencing your sources adequately, as well as ensuring their integrity.

Reflection: What seems to be most challenging for you as you seek to maintain and guard the integrity of your literature sources?

Where Did You Find Your Sources?

Answering this question involves setting up a system to keep track of your references. This might include using a physical tracking system with well-organized note cards or software that will help you with electronic referencing, such as Endnote or Zotero. Using an organizational system to keep track of the literature along with your annotations about the literature is vital to proper referencing and maintaining integrity. A well-structured tracking system will also make it easier to find the necessary resources when you are ready to write.

How Will You Reference Your Sources?

Depending on the style guides of your institution or publishers, you will need to adapt to a referencing system, whether it entails footnotes, endnotes, in-line citations, or other features. Various referencing styles are available, including APA, Chicago, MLA, or a specific style that your institution requires. In any case, use only one style for the publication you are writing. Never mix styles. Learn how to use whichever style is required with the help of all the online resources or tutorials posted on the appropriate website. For instance, if you use APA 7 style, use the tutorials [on their webpage](#) or buy their style guide. To properly document your sources and retain personal and academic integrity, it is essential to employ some documentation system in accordance with your institution or publisher.

How Will You Preserve the Integrity of the Content of Your Readings?

It is vital not to plagiarize or give the impression that another's ideas and work are yours without proper citations, which is why it is crucial to develop a system to keep track of your resources. As Christian researchers, we should desire to give credit wherever it is due. Excellent resources on avoiding plagiarism can be found, for instance, at [Purdue University\(USA\)](#). Many universities also have plagiarism checking software, made available to students and faculty. When using such software, make sure that no more than 15% of the work is 'similar' to that of a referenced internet source. Using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence tool to write your publication should be avoided. It might be useful in finding references and resources, but it should be used with care as the references may not be reliable. Many plagiarism checkers now also include an AI checker.

Reflection: Now, you can reflect on and share how you are going to guard your sources for your research. You can use the three questions above.

As I mentioned in my book, *Research as Worship*, 'Humility and discipline are a Christian researcher's key values!'¹¹

¹¹ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 50.

Reflection: Could you write a reflection on this sentence? What thoughts does reading this sentence trigger in you?

How Shall We Anchor Our Research?

As the pillars in the tabernacle were held tight and straight by cords and hooks in the ground, your research needs to be anchored in scientific and relevant contextual frameworks to make it credible.

Research is not done independently and out of context.

As the pillars were attached to each other by linen cloth, your research is connected and is developed in community—the community of previous research done in similar fields, but also the community of current researchers. It is the overall set of pillars well-grounded by cords and hooks as well as by the linen cloth that constituted the wall of the tabernacle. Your research is just like one pillar standing up because of its grounding in context and former (often hidden) research, but also because of its connectedness with the other pillars through the panels of linen cloth. Therefore, in the literature review chapter of your research, you are asked to look into similar previous research that you can identify in your field while also connecting with other researchers in your field or connected fields. We will work further on how to organize the literature that grounds your research. Right now, take the time to identify and write down who are the resource people in your networks whom you could contact and dialogue with regarding your research.

Reflection: Write down their names and pray for each of them, asking the Lord to give you favour in their eyes so that you can make valuable connections with them and get further resources, advice and perspectives from them.

Pushing the pillar metaphor further, you will note that one pillar is not enough to hold the fence straight. Similarly, we can liken each of the pillars to the various conceptual frameworks that your research will take value from and will be related to.

Just as these pillars were systematically aligned and were held straight by cords, bars and hooks, one by one, likewise you, for each research secondary question, will need to identify the conceptual or theoretical framework(s) undergirding it. Practically, you will take your research matrix and add a column next to the first two columns with your research objectives and your research questions. It will look like Table 5.¹²

¹² Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 51.

RESEARCH FOCUS	RESEARCH QUESTION	CONCEPTUAL/ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (found in the references below)
Overall focus	<i>How can doctoral students be helped to complete their doctoral dissertation?</i>	
1st secondary	<i>How many students have failed to complete their doctoral dissertation in the past 10 years?</i>	<i>Dissertation completion: No longer higher education's invisible problem¹³</i>
2nd secondary	<i>Why do students fail to complete their doctoral dissertation?</i>	<i>The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being¹⁴</i>
3rd secondary	<i>What quality of support is provided to doctoral students?</i>	<i>Four-dimensional model for doctoral student support¹⁵</i>
4th secondary	<i>What solutions are proposed to help students complete their dissertations?</i>	<i>Above-referenced frameworks and Testing theories of doctoral student persistence at a Hispanic serving institution¹⁶</i>

Table 5: Alignment of Research Questions and Conceptual Frameworks

This process will lead to identifying the frameworks that are relevant to each research question. You may have several frameworks to refer to for one specific research focus, just as each pillar was anchored with at least four silver hooks and cords to keep it straight. Each was pointing in a different direction. But together, they complemented each other and thus kept the pillar straight.¹⁷

Anchoring your research in relevant conceptual frameworks will thus help you to create the conceptual backbone of your research. The 'walls' surrounding the Tabernacle led to a beautiful gate, which was the entrance to the courtyard of the Tabernacle.¹⁸ Here is an

¹³ Sarah M. Marshall, Barbara Klocko, and Jillian Davidson, 'Dissertation Completion: No Longer Higher Education's Invisible Problem', *Journal of Educational Research and Practice* 7/1 (2017): 74-90; accessed 11 April 2024.

¹⁴ Anna Sverdlik, et al., 'The PhD Experience: A Review of the Factors Influencing Doctoral Students' Completion, Achievement, and Well-being', *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 13 (2018): 361-88, accessed 11 April 2024.

¹⁵ Simone C. Conceição and Lilian H. Hill, '[Four-Dimensional Model for Doctoral Student Support](#)', 2019 Adult Education Research Conference in Buffalo, NY; accessed 11 April 2024.

¹⁶ Gloria S. Vaquera, 'Testing Theories of Doctoral Student Persistence at a Hispanic Institution', *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 9/3 (November 2007): 283-305.

¹⁷ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 52

¹⁸ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 53.

example of an overarching conceptual framework for a monograph on the theme of techno-theology (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Conceptual Frameworks for Techno-Theology¹⁹

Reflection: It is perhaps time for you to create a concept map or a colourful diagram that will represent how your various conceptual frameworks are connected with each other and how they connect with the purpose of your research.

What a Colorful Gate!

Having the research firmly structured points to the worshipper's readiness to enter the tabernacle's courtyard. In the times of old, this was possible through a beautifully woven gate. This gate had four colours, each symbolizing one of the four dimensions through which Christ's life is portrayed as seen in the gospels, as a plethora of commentators point out.

Gaining a deeper understanding of Christ's humanity and divinity, of his royalty as well as his incarnation, will help shape the researcher's perspectives into a profoundly worshipful mindset.

¹⁹ Godspower Ugboh, *Conceptual Framework for Techno-Theology*, unpublished draft, 2023. Used with permission

The beautiful and colourful gate of the tabernacle leads us to reflect on the role of art in your research. Using artistic visuals or audio pieces is not excluded from research. God is a God of creativity, and you are encouraged to seek to go beyond using words in communicating your research-related thinking. The gate's beautifully woven tapestry may also be an image of how your literature pieces are interwoven with each other. Demonstrating how each of your frameworks relate to your research focus and to other frameworks that you are using to ground your research will be very valuable to strengthen the background of your research.

Consequently, you will appear to be making the literature dialog with each other. This is why the phrase 'literature review' could be rephrased as dialog with literature, which is a much life-conveying term. This dialog will be conducted with integrity and order, but also dynamically and in a lively manner to convey the multifaceted and life-giving approaches that can support a specific focus in research. The end result will be the multicoloured gate that we are going to look at next.²⁰

In your dialog with literature, you will critically examine the scope of each piece of literature, and especially the various frameworks that will constitute the assets for your research, but also its limitations. The often-used term 'critical thinking' is not a negative term; rather, it expresses our humanness and limitations, but also the creative perspectives that we can communicate. Thus, each piece of literature is like a jewel that you need to chisel to make it fit the purpose for which you want to use it. You will probably need to cut a few pieces off to display its special beauty. Likewise, each piece of literature is written within a specific context, for a specific purpose, and also with specific implications. Not all these aspects may be relevant for your context or purpose.

Discerning the specific elements of various pieces of literature that are relevant to your research focus and connecting them with each other will help you to interact with literature in a meaningful way that will weave together the background literature elements of your research.

Figure 3 below is a representation of how the literature review for a doctoral dissertation on the theology of work in the context of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants has been organized.

²⁰ Audéoud, *Research as Worship*, 52-3.

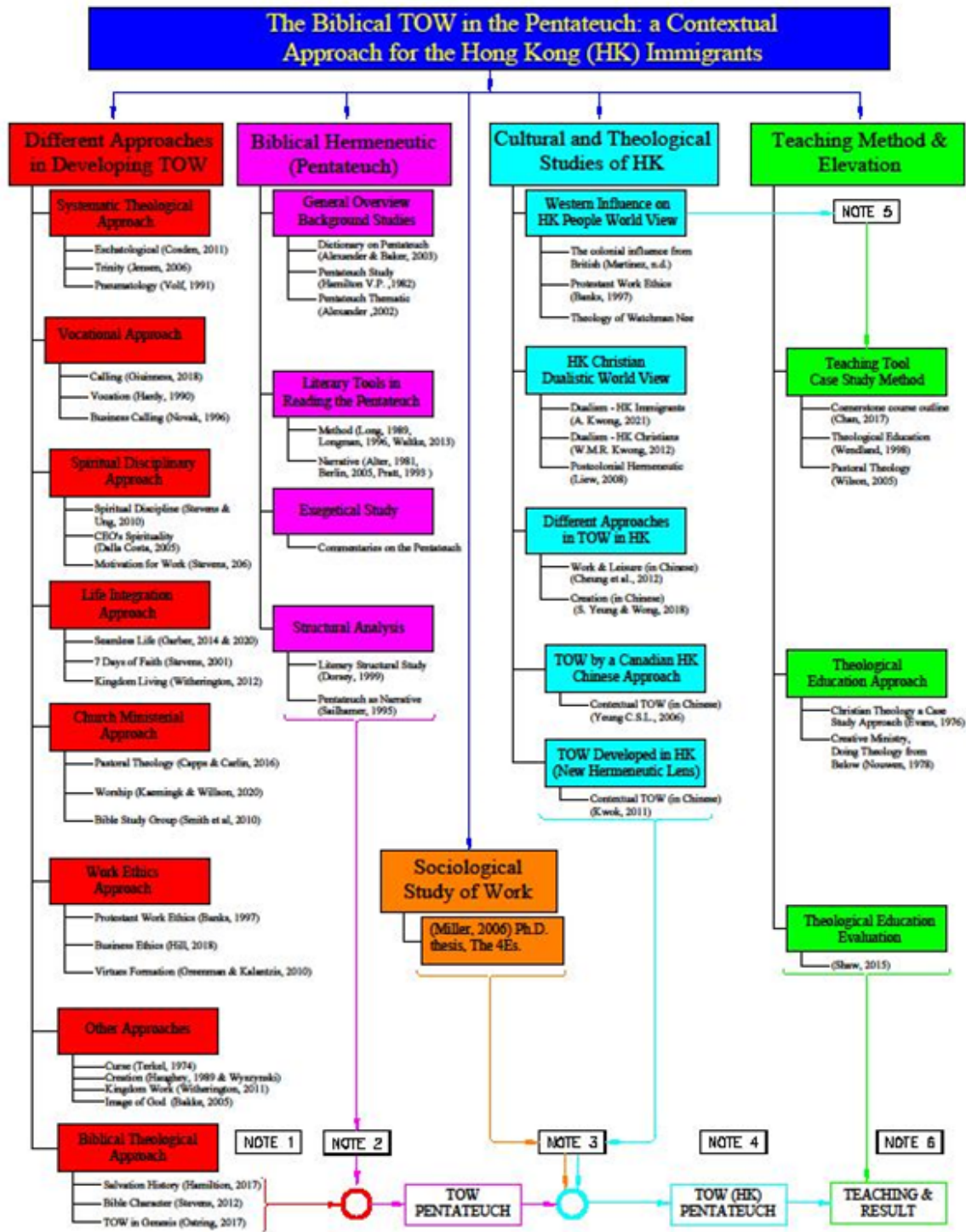


Figure 3: Example of a Concept Map to Organize a Literature Review²¹

The literature review that you develop will allow you to enter the courtyard of the tabernacle. This courtyard is where the Israelites worked with the priests to bring their offering to God. It represents the common, shared places and processes where researchers interact with elements of their research community or environment. The next part of this study guide will reflect on the various elements that are involved in setting up the processes where your research will take place.

²¹ Wilson Chan's 2023 unpublished doctoral draft, 'Literature Review Conceptual Map'. Used with permission

Part 4:
What is Your Research
Approach?

Using our tabernacle metaphor, we are now entering into the tabernacle's courtyard. The courtyard served as the designated area where the Israelites presented their sacrifices to God. Here, the priests performed the act of slaughtering animals as offerings. This spacious area housed two crucial elements: the bronze altar and the bronze laver. The priests' duties involved preparing themselves as well as the sacrifices to be offered on the altar to God.

The bronze laver was a prominent fixture in the courtyard. The placement of the laver was strategic, between the altar and the entrance to the holy place, as outlined in Leviticus 30:17–21. It is noteworthy that it was crafted from bronze and constructed using women's mirrors, as mentioned in Exodus 38:8. As Christine Lilyquist suggests in her study of ancient mirrors, these bronze mirrors were likely acquired from the Egyptians during the Israelites' departure from Egypt, as Egyptian women commonly possessed such mirrors.²² This detail underscores the value of tapping into the wisdom of academic colleagues who may not share a Christian perspective. The Lord has also endowed them with insights and wisdom that can prove beneficial.

Christian researchers are thus encouraged to leverage these resources, so as to reshape them and reframe them while seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance on how to seamlessly integrate their approaches, strategies and implementation processes into specific facets of our research.

God uses individuals for His purposes, even when they may be unaware of it.

Cleansing was also an important part of the priestly rules. The sacrifices being offered had to be clean, so the priests cleansed themselves often. We can imagine what a challenge this may have been as the animals were slaughtered and blood was splashing all over the place! Even before starting their work as priests, they had to be completely bathed in an act of consecration to God at the bronze laver. But that was not the end of the process. Priests also engaged in continuous visits to the laver throughout the day as they carried out their duties of offering sacrifices to God. This ongoing movement back and forth is reminiscent of Romans 12:1–2, which encourages Christians, including Christian researchers, to present themselves to God and to allow for the continual renewal of their minds through the transformative work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:16) and the guidance of the Word of God (Col. 3:16).

Thus, as researchers navigate the various stages of their research projects, they are called to remain in constant dialogue with God, regularly evaluating their thoughts, attitudes and emotions, as well as ensuring the reliability and ethical integrity of their research to truly “gain Christ” (Phil. 3:7–11).

²² Christine Lilyquist, *Ancient Egyptian Mirrors from the Earliest Times through the Middle Kingdom*, Münchner Ägyptologische Studien 27 (Munich: University of Munich Press, 1979); accessed 11 April 2024.

Research with Christ requires unwavering focus on him.

When the Jewish priests offered sacrifices to God, they also followed a meticulous process of examining the animal intended for sacrifice. This examination included an initial assessment of its purity and suitability for the offering, leading to a series of carefully planned and organized steps required to prepare for and execute the sacrifice. This highly regulated procedure demanded time, contemplation, assessments and coordination before the worship process could be concluded, allowing for communion with God and with those participating in or facilitating the offering.

Similarly, researchers are encouraged to note the importance of defining relevant and appropriate methodological approaches for their research, specifying data collection strategies, outlining research limitations and boundaries, and adhering to ethical standards to ensure that the research aligns with God's intentions, ultimately leading to a meaningful offering.

Thus, in the courtyard, many processes and decisions are taking place. You may now be in an excellent position to make methodological choices.

In the Jewish system of offerings, various kinds of sacrifices could be offered. How they were offered was different from one sacrifice to another. Each had an intended purpose and subsequent means for conducting the sacrifice. Similarly, as a researcher, you will need to discern which specific research approaches will best match the kind of data you will need to collect, which includes specifying data collection strategies, outlining research limitations and boundaries, and adhering to ethical standards to ensure that the research aligns with God's intentions, all in an effort to make a meaningful offering to the Lord. If you have access to a collection of research methods books, be sure to use them for specific methodological help.

You may also need to clarify various terms and their intended uses. [This website](#) might be helpful in understanding these terms and the level at which they are used. Please take time to review the terms and understand how they relate to each other.

Reflection: Consider the terms you have reviewed. Is any term or research concept still unclear to you? If so, write them down and do further research to clarify, using other books on research methods.

When you are clear about the methodologies available, you may want to clarify the decisions you need to make in order to define your research approaches. I invite you to create a flowchart or a diagram to make your methodological decisions.

Reflection: What are the research approaches that you have chosen? You may want to create your own flowchart or any other visual or piece of writing that will argue for your choices.

Are the Research Instruments Congruent with Your Research Questions?

As you make decisions on your research approaches and instruments, be careful to arrange your choices specifically and with good reason. You need to explain why you chose one approach compared to another or why you chose this instrument instead of other possible data collection strategies. As you make these decisions and narrow your focus, remember that God is a God of shalom, perfect harmony and peace.

Prayerfully, while seeking the Lord's inspiration and the advice of your Personal Learning Community, update your research matrix with your anticipated research approaches and research instruments, maintaining the congruence that you have built thus far for your research. Claim this promise of Prov. 3:6 (NLT): 'Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.'

Whom Should Data be Collected From and How?

While you look to align your research sample processes with God's shalom, it will take some effort to select participants in your research who will reflect most adequately and fairly the community you are researching.

Reflection: What are your challenges as you seek to decide on the size and the makeup of your sample groups? What problems do you expect to encounter in meeting these people? Ask the Lord to bring the right people to you at the right time. Pray for the Lord to give you favour in their eyes.

Collecting data from people is a holy exercise since you enter, often as an outsider, into people's private spaces. As you reflect and make decisions regarding the people from whom you will collect data, like the Jewish people of old who had to choose the best animal possible, the Holy Spirit will guide you in the details of the choices to be made. The Spirit collaborates joyfully with you in the details and the unfolding of your research.

Reflection: List the people or groups of people that you will seek data from. Take time to pray for them.

As you reflect and pray for those who are the focus of your research, how will you best demonstrate respect for them? Are there vulnerable people that you will need to protect? If so, you will have to submit a request to your Institutional Review Board or similar institutional structures to ensure that vulnerable people will be protected and not taken advantage of or abused by your research.

Reflection: What ethical safeguards will you set up to conduct your research?

You have now taken time to dwell in the courtyard, making many choices and decisions. You have taken time to strategize in order to move forward with your research. A lot of time, reflections, discussion and writing has taken place. You are now ready to collect the data for your research. You are ready to enter the Holy Place!

Part 5:
Entering the Tabernacle

As the priest offered their sacrifices, they also had work to do in the Holy Place of the tabernacle on a daily basis. We can gain insight from this daily, priestly work into how a more intimate and profound relationship with our triune God can provide sustenance during this unique phase of the research process. Let us first consider how the Holy Place in the tabernacle was organized.

Based on the work of the High Priest, I am proposing that researchers enter into God's presence in a special way when gathering the data for their research and analyzing it in order to finalize the presentation of the research outcomes. The data collected are instrumental in shaping our research and response to God's missional call on our lives. From the more common or mundane place like the outer courtyard, the High Priest enters into a very special place where he experiences the Lord's presence in very significant ways.

The Tabernacle's Holy Place

The data gathering and analysis process is a time when researchers obtain data from the field or from their readings within their specific research foci. It is a time when one can become absorbed with technicalities while forgetting the manifold ways God reveals aspects of his glory displayed throughout the communities under research. Maintaining close communion with the Lord and practicing spiritual disciplines are of crucial importance during this phase of research.



Figure 4: [The Holy Place](#) (used by permission of Frederic Travier)

Researchers may find themselves grappling with the nature of the data collected or yet to be collected. As the priests entered the Holy Place at least twice a day to ensure that the incense and the lights kept burning, researchers should take the time to enter constantly into God's presence. In these moments, they can share with God the joys or challenges they have encountered during the data collection phase. It is essential to draw inspiration from 1 Corinthians 1:28-30 (NIV):

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Recognizing our limitations, whether they be in wisdom, physical, intellectual capacity, or the perceived lack of recognition and value a researcher's work might receive in human eyes, it is vital to understand that Christian researchers find their ultimate refuge in Christ.

In him, they discover wisdom, holiness and redemption. His holiness shields researchers from the pitfalls they may encounter in the data collection journey, ensuring that their work remains righteous.

Three primary pieces of furniture held utmost significance in the Holy Place of the tabernacle: the showbread table, the candlesticks of pure gold with seven lamps, and the golden altar of incense. Understanding these three pieces of furniture metaphorically, researchers will discover three spiritual dispositions and practices necessary for this precious time of data collection and analysis: (1) be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, (2) remain humble while accounting for the limitations and brokenness of one's humanity and feeding on Christ's humanity, and (3) commune with God through prayer. Throughout this final part of the study guide, researchers are called to remain in close fellowship with God. Activities and problems encountered during the time of research will be constant reminders that research is ultimately in God's hands and performed under his guidance and direction.

Many books and resources on practicing spiritual disciplines to nurture a Christ-like disposition and the fruits of the Spirit have been written. You may have read several already. Choose one or two of these books and become (re)acquainted with them.

Reflection: After examining a few of these resources, write down some specific encouragements that the Lord gives you through these books. In what ways do you need to refocus your spiritual disciplines and perhaps spend more quality time with the Lord?

After engaging in these reflections, take time to discuss them with the members of your Personal Learning Community or with your accountability group. They also may offer you encouragement, advice or warnings.

Reflection: What are the outcomes of your discussions with your Personal Learning Community regarding your personal spiritual disciplines? In what ways are the members of your Personal Learning Community also committed to supporting you spiritually as you gather your data and analyze them?

The Golden Candlestick

The golden candlestick with its lamps and burning oil can be considered a representation of God's guidance and support in research, made evident through the illumination provided by the Holy Spirit. While the specific dimensions of this candlestick remain unknown, we can surmise that it was quite substantial, designated to radiate light throughout the entire Holy Place.

Just as the priests were tasked with lighting and refilling the lamps of the golden candlestick with oil each morning and evening, researchers are strongly encouraged to dedicate time each day, at both morning and evening (and as needed throughout the day!), to submitting their thoughts to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

The Holy Spirit is eager to continually fill the researcher's thoughts so as to shed light on even the darkest areas that may require revelation during the data collection efforts.

The Lord Jesus promised his disciples, and thus all Christian researchers, "The Father ... will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. ... But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17, NIV). This promise is a profound source of comfort, affirming that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, constantly resides within every Christian researcher.

The Holy Spirit will lead researchers to propose innovative and redemptive approaches as outcomes of their data collection and analysis, while navigating the challenges encountered in the data collection and interpretation phases of the research.

Guided by the power and the discernment provided by the Holy Spirit, who occasionally may direct researchers in unexpected ways (as symbolized by the absence of measurements of the candlestick), researchers are led towards the data that God intends for them to acknowledge and engage with.

While you work on your data collection and analysis, you may have seen the Lord's hand in many specific, small but highly meaningful ways. Every day, like the priests who had to clean the candlesticks and pour new oil in them, you can assess the quality of the work that has been done and bring it to the Lord. He will give you insights and guide you through his Spirit as to how to move on with your data collection and analysis.

Reflection: Perhaps you have seen God's special hand as you met some unexpected people, as you were able to find information in very useful ways, as you received new, unexpected insights while doing your data collection and analysis. Could you jot down some of them here, if you haven't yet started a researcher's journal (which I highly encourage you to maintain)?

The Showbread Table

Within the Holy Place, another piece of furniture held significance: the table of the showbread. It featured two rows of bread loaves, each possibly having a unique appearance. Additionally, frankincense was placed on these loaves, not only to preserve them during their week-long display but also to create a fragrant ambience in the Holy Place. On each Sabbath, the priests were to replace the bread, partaking of the old loaves within the Holy Place.

This imagery may inspire Christian researchers as well. As they embark on data collection, they are confronted with the unavoidable unpredictability of life, the diversity of individuals, and their own humanity. Although the loaves of bread may be irregular, God can be completely trusted to align them within the broader design of the table.

In other words, given our own irregularities and difficulties during this phase of research, God can (re)align us to his purposes.

Remember, in moments of distress, researchers should find solace in this promise: 'Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans' (Prov. 16:3 NIV).

Changing the bread loaves weekly, specifically on the Sabbath, and partaking of it in God's presence was a ritual to which the priests were committed. This ritual serves as an invitation to researchers to partake in weekly Sabbaths during their research-intensive journey. It is not uncommon to witness researchers fully immersed in their projects, toiling day and night, and gradually becoming consumed by their work. Perhaps the priestly schedule can offer valuable guidance in this regard, encouraging researchers to take time regularly, if not weekly, to savour the 'bread' in God's presence.

Rest and stepping back permit reflection on progress made so far, fostering an atmosphere for prayer, worship and meaningful conversations with our support networks.

This intermission also opens the door for the Holy Spirit to impart fresh insights and perspectives.

The showbread table and the loaves of bread themselves also disclose the frailties of

our humanity and how they can interfere with our research plans, whether due to illness on the day of a major research-related appointment, or a war started when you started collecting data (this very situation happened to one of my students, who was conducting research in Ukraine just as the war broke out), or when transportation unexpectedly breaks down. Despite the frustration of these unexpected events, we know that ultimately, it is not our research but God's. He is in charge.

Reflection: Write down an example or two where your research plans were altered due to unexpected events. Reflect and share how that affected your relationship with the Lord and how you managed this unpredictability.

The Altar of Incense

The final piece of sacred furniture in the Holy Place is the altar of incense that stands before the veil adorned with cherubim, serving as the threshold to the Most Holy Place. The priests had a sacred duty here. They were to take burning coals from the bronze altar located in the courtyard and carefully place them on top of the altar of incense. Subsequently, they would pour the fragrant incense, prepared meticulously in accordance with God's instructions (as outlined in Exodus 20:1-9, 34-38), creating a heavenly aroma as they performed this sacred ritual.

Revelation 8:2-4 unequivocally affirms that the incense presented before God represents the prayers of the saints. This passage underscores the profound significance of these prayers in the spiritual realm. Leviticus 16:2 further illustrates that the fire used on the altar of incense originates from the altar of burnt offerings, conveying a powerful symbolic message: prayers find acceptance in God's divine presence only when they have been cleansed and sanctified by the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, represented by the altar of burnt offerings.

Prayer stands as an indispensable component of the research process for Christian scholars, particularly when engaged in data collection and analysis. Reflecting on the significance of the incense offered to God through prayer and worship, as articulated in Psalm 141, Christian researchers come to realize that prayer encompasses and sustains every facet of their research, particularly during the challenges encountered in the field.

As Stan Nussbaum stated, 'Prayer and research are not substitutes for each other.'²³

Without prayer, your research will lack the very presence of Christ.

²³ Stan Nussbaum, *Breakthrough! Steps to Research and Resolve the Mysteries in Your Ministry* (Colorado Springs, CO: GMI Research Services, 2007), 14.

The work of a Christian researcher transcends mere academia; it is an embodiment of faith, a response to God's calling to partake in advancing his kingdom of peace in the specific field of study. Therefore, such a vibrant prayer life and ongoing communion with the triune God are experienced within this realm of unceasing joy and repose in God's presence, similar to how the ancient priests were inhaling the fragrant incense while carrying out their duties in the Holy Place.

The altar of incense was placed just before the curtain that led to the Most Holy Place. This shows the utmost importance of prayer as we enter into God's presence and is a reminder of Christ's highly priestly intercession on our behalf before the Father (Heb. 4:14–16). Christ stands with and before for us. Likewise, our prayers are brought through Christ to the Father (John 16:23–27). Many books have been written about prayer, but they are not a substitute for the practice of prayer. Prayer is the fuel of your research. Without prayer, your research will lack the very presence of Christ.

Reflection: Consider your prayer life. How could it be strengthened? Alternatively, you can write down a prayer that you will keep praying specifically concerning your research.

Consider the various rhythms and tasks performed by the High Priest in the Holy Place. Exodus 30:7 tells us that every morning and every night incense had been burned on the altar, which we later learn is a representation of the intercession that Christ is doing on our behalf (Romans 8:34). And yet we also learn from the apostle Paul that the prayers that we utter are prompted by the Holy Spirit. Given the day and night rhythms, the lamps had to be lit every night and had to be tended to every morning (Exodus 30:7–8). Similarly, the Holy Spirit, represented by the lampstand and the oil, has to be powerful in the researcher's life day in and day out. The Holy Spirit moves with the researcher throughout the various research steps. The Christian researcher should be in a constant state of prayer, both day and night.

Reflection: What are the rhythms of your spiritual disciplines? Is there any rhythm that you feel that you need to alter? What does your Sabbath look like?

The rituals we have reviewed support your life and your relationship with the Lord, especially as you work day in and day out on your data collection and analysis. It may seem at times that your mental and physical energies are exhausted. Our intimacy with the Lord will sustain us in these very special days!

Entering Through the Veil

You have now completed the write-up of your data collection and analysis. Now you

will weave together the concluding chapter of your research project. Like the beautiful veil that constituted the entrance into the holiest place, which was woven skillfully, your concluding chapter will propose answers to your research questions, supported by your data collection. Such a chapter will close the loop initiated in the first chapter, where you discussed your research problem. Once the writing is complete, take time to edit and refine your thinking from a technical perspective as well.

Reflection: As you review all the work that has been completed, what beauties of the Lord's glory have you uncovered? Especially if you cannot state this in your dissertation (if it is for a secular audience), you may account below for the beauties of the Lord's glories that you have uncovered through your research.

Entering Into the Most Holy Place

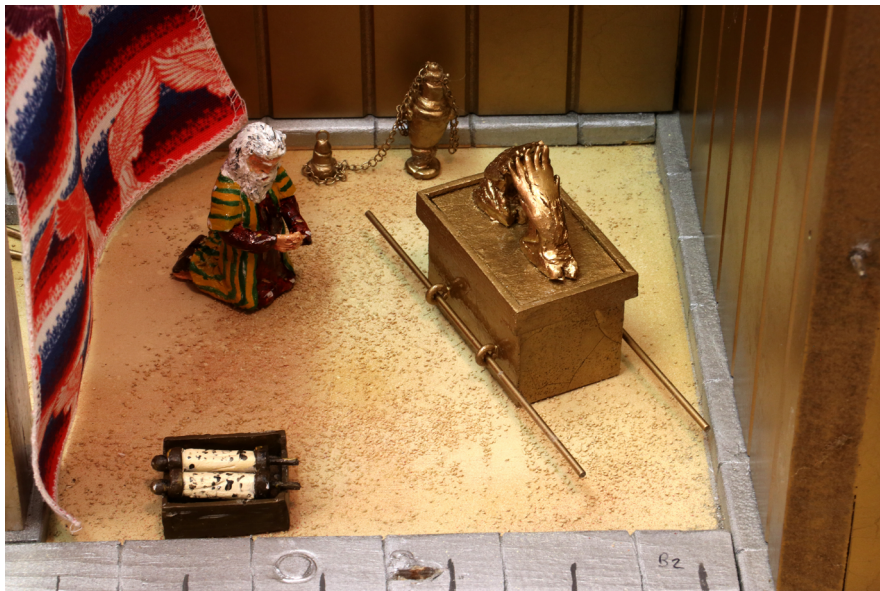


Figure 5: [The Most Holy Place](#) (used by permission of Frederic Travier)

Moving beyond the altar of incense and through the veil behind it, we now stand at the threshold of God's most sacred dwelling place, the Most Holy Place, where his divine presence is unveiled and made comprehensible in human terms. Its central piece of furniture, the ark of the covenant, holds a position of unparalleled importance in the Bible with 180 references. Hebrews 9:3–5 details the contents of the ark, in which lie a golden vessel containing manna, Aaron's miraculously budding rod, and the stone tablets bearing the covenant that God bestowed upon Moses at the top of Mt. Sinai (Heb. 5:3–5).

Lifting this heavy veil to enter into the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle was a yearly ritual. Annually, on the sacred celebration of Yom Kippur, the High Priest entered this holy chamber, enveloped in a cloud of fragrant incense drawn from the altar of incense. Inside, a profound ritual unfolded: the High Priest sprinkled the blood from the sin

offering on the eastern side of the mercy seat, a solemn act detailed in Leviticus 16:11–14.

Outside, the Israelites and a contingent of priests anxiously awaited the High Priest's emergence. With his act, he concluded the yearly atonement for the sins of the people of Israel. The gravity and majesty of this ceremony were palpable, making it a truly awe-inspiring and momentous event.

Christian scholars are tasked with the responsibility of presenting and sharing their research, a task not necessarily restricted to an annual occurrence.

Throughout the research journey, they have collaborated with God, from the project's inception to its current state. When the time comes to unveil their research findings to the public, it can be as intimidating as the moment when the High Priest ventured into the Most Holy Place, stepping into the very presence of God himself, while the crowd was waiting outside. Similarly, making your research public is a very unique event that needs careful attention and preparation. But just as the High Priest was shrouded in a cloud of burning incense upon entering the Most Holy Place, Christian researchers find themselves enveloped and nearly concealed in the presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, our Lord Jesus offered this profound assurance to His disciples:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. ... he lives with you and will be[a] in you ... the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:16, 17, 26, NIV).

Having unveiled a fresh facet of God's glory through the completion of their research, Christian researchers share their findings publicly, while allowing God's glory to radiate in a truly exceptional manner.

In essence, it is a celebration for the entire Trinity to witness another divine glory made known to the whole universe! Such a celebration may be only a one-time event, but it can become a continuous event as researchers are often called to publish their research, all with the goal of bringing more people to celebrate God's newly unfolded glory!

It is such an awesome experience to move into God's presence with your completed work! Whether your research presentation is in a secular or Christian setting, it is done in God's breathtaking presence. The whole Trinity is receiving your completed project! This is your final act of worship! Hallelujah!!! Even if, in some ways (and I know by experience that it can happen!), you experience some less positive feedback during your

on-site presentation, pray that the Lord will give you a peaceful heart in his presence and that he brings to your mind the right ideas and answers. Like the smoke cloud of the incense of old, 'the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4:7 NIV).

Reflection: As you debrief before the Lord on your experience of presenting or defending your research, write down any thoughts, questions, or other comments or impressions that you don't want to forget. Debrief your emotions and put into simple words, or in prayer, in a drawing or a song how the Lord has been your stronghold and anchor throughout this unique experience.

Going Out, Celebrating in Community!

Similar to the anticipation by the congregation waiting for the High Priest to come out of the Most Holy Place, hoping that he would not be killed by God's presence, your community of friends, your Personal Learning Community, your fellow researchers, and the community on behalf of which you have conducted your research will want to celebrate with you! Take the time to celebrate, to thank all of those who have supported you, and to worship the Lord in any way possible!

Psalm 92 (NIV) may summarize your jubilation well:

It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name, O Most High,
proclaiming your love in the morning
and your faithfulness at night,
to the music of the ten-stringed lyre
and the melody of the harp.
For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD;
I sing for joy at what your hands have done.
How great are your works, LORD,
how profound your thoughts!
Senseless people do not know,
fools do not understand,
that though the wicked spring up like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they will be destroyed forever.
But you, LORD, are forever exalted.
For surely your enemies, LORD,
surely your enemies will perish;

all evildoers will be scattered.
You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox;
fine oils have been poured on me.
My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries;
my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.
The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
planted in the house of the LORD,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.
They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,
proclaiming, "The LORD is upright;
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.
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they will stay fresh and green,
proclaiming, "The LORD is upright;
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Epilogue

Together, throughout the preceding pages, we have embarked on a profound journey into God's most sacred sanctuary, guided by our High Priest, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We have meticulously progressed step by step in our quest for deeper communion with Him as Christian researchers. We have drawn inspiration from the rich tapestry of metaphors woven within the setting of the tabernacle in the desert, each offering us a unique perspective on a specific aspect of the glory of our triune God. This sacred narrative has not only illuminated the multifaceted grace of God but has also underscored the practical wisdom and detailed guidance imparted by our Lord in the research pilgrimage. May the following contemporary application of Mark 16:19-20, as applied to Christian researchers, be an encouragement to you as a concluding reflection.

As Christian researchers continue their dedicated work, the Lord's hand is evident in their efforts. He elevates their work and grants them insight and wisdom. The culmination of their studies is marked by a sense of divine approval. In harmony with His divine purpose, their research bears abundant fruit and their scholarly efforts are confirmed by the evident blessings of the Lord.

Additional Resources

Flett, John G. 'A Theology of Missio Dei'. *Theology in Scotland* 21/1 (2014): 69-78.

McKinzie, G. 'On Worldview 1 ([Missional Anthropology](#))'. *Scripture and Mission Blog*. 2013.

Sillars, D. and M. Hallowell. 'Opinion-based Research: Lessons Learned from Four Approaches'. *Building a Sustainable Future. Proceedings from the Construction Research Congress, 2009.*

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Martine Audéoud (Côte d'Ivoire) grew up in France and spent over 30 years in Africa and Haiti. She holds a PhD in School Administration and Curriculum Supervision and a DMin in Urban Transformational Leadership. She is currently Academic Advisor to the President of Bakke Graduate University and Director of the doctoral program. She co-lead the development of a training curriculum in French on post-traumatic counseling in response to the Ivorian civil war (2010-2011), which she experienced. Her research interests include urban transformation, women in leadership, Christian service, mission and academic research.