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## Shalom Seeking: Foundations of Flourishing

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## Shalom Seeking: Foundations of Flourishing

### Abstract

Jesus instructs us to seek first the Kingdom of God. Seeking first the Kingdom of God is no small task. It is a process of striving to show God's love in every situation by showing love to our neighbors and to the rest of the creation. It is serving in a way that enables them to flourish. Seeking first the Kingdom of God is striving for true progress in all its wholeness; it is seeking shalom [1]. Shalom is an Old Testament word which refers to the restfulness, contentment, beauty, and harmony of a life lived in perfect obedience to God's will. Shalom is a condition in which everyone and everything is in right relationship all the time. When shalom is the order of the day, human and non-human creation are enabled to flourish by becoming everything God created them to be. Therefore, the call to seek shalom, which includes our work as engineers, is no less than a call to obedient living. With the goal of flourishing the whole of creation, we were made and have been remade to seek shalom as we lovingly meet technological needs around us. God is glorified through our care-filled engineering of the creation when it leads to blessing for all. Our engineering work seeks shalom when it is motivated by love for God and neighbor, is guided by Kingdom knowledge of community and place, and results in holistic flourishing. This paper is a first step toward exploring the practical implications of seeking shalom through our work as engineers. Seeking first the Kingdom of God requires knowledge of that Kingdom and our role in it. I strive to develop a comprehensive, biblically-based, and creationally-informed understanding of flourishing that can serve as a meaningful guide for living before the face of God (coram Deo). While the underlying principles are as broad as all of life, I generally illustrate them using engineering examples.

### Keywords

shalom, Kingdom of God, Image of God, stewards, redemption, motivation, community

### Disciplines

Christianity | Engineering

### Comments

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# Shalom Seeking: Foundations of Flourishing

CEC 2017

Kevin Timmer\*

## 1.0 Abstract

Jesus instructs us to seek first the Kingdom of God. Seeking first the Kingdom of God is no small task. It is a process of striving to show God's love in every situation by showing love to our neighbors and to the rest of the creation. It is serving in a way that enables them to flourish. Seeking first the Kingdom of God is striving for true progress in all its wholeness; it is seeking shalom [1]. Shalom is an Old Testament word which refers to the restfulness, contentment, beauty, and harmony of a life lived in perfect obedience to God's will. Shalom is a condition in which everyone and everything is in right relationship all the time. When shalom is the order of the day, human and non-human creation are enabled to flourish by becoming everything God created them to be. Therefore, the call to seek shalom, which includes our work as engineers, is no less than a call to obedient living. With the goal of flourishing the whole of creation, we were made and have been remade to seek shalom as we lovingly meet technological needs around us. God is glorified through our care-filled engineering of the creation when it leads to blessing for all. Our engineering work seeks shalom when it is motivated by love for God and neighbor, is guided by Kingdom knowledge of community and place, and results in holistic flourishing.

This paper is a first step toward exploring the practical implications of seeking shalom through our work as engineers. Seeking first the Kingdom of God requires knowledge of that Kingdom and our role in it. I strive to develop a comprehensive, biblically-based, and creationally-informed understanding of flourishing that can serve as a meaningful guide for living before the face of God (*coram Deo*). While the underlying principles are as broad as all of life, I generally illustrate them using engineering examples.

## 2.0 Introduction

Shalom is an Old Testament word which refers to the restfulness, contentment, beauty and harmony of a life lived in perfect obedience to God's will. Shalom is a condition in which everyone and everything is in right relationship all the time [2]. When shalom is the order of the day, human and non-human creation are enabled to flourish by becoming everything God created them to be at their appointed time and place. This condition existed before the fall of Adam and Eve into sin and its complete restoration is assured through Christ's death and resurrection. Christ's work restores the possibility of a right relationship with God but also with each other and the rest of the creation. By the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, we are prodded and enabled to seek Christ's Kingdom first and to find it. His Kingdom is a kingdom of right relationships. It is a kingdom of shalom [1]. Although the victory is won, believers are called to continue to wage war against the powers of evil by proclaiming the good news until Christ returns. We are called to be His disciples by seeking first His Kingdom.

Seeking first the Kingdom of God is no small task. It is a process of striving to show God's love in every situation by showing love to our neighbors and to the rest of the creation. It is serving in a way that enables them to flourish. As a first step, we need to deny ourselves and pay attention to the needs around us rather than our own. It requires that we get to know those around us, enabling us to help them become what God intended them to be – redeemed, loving

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servants of Christ. However, seeking shalom is not just limited to our relationship with others, it also applies to our interactions with the rest of the creation. It requires that we understand the rest of the creation well enough to know how best to manage it so that it too can flourish as God intends. Everything we do impacts our neighbor and the rest of the creation in some way. The call to seek shalom is a call to no less than obedient living, which includes our work as engineers.

Engineered artifacts, whether physical items or a set of procedures, are designed to be used. When put to use, the artifact helps shape the nature of the relationships between the user and the various aspects of their surroundings, including other people. Our technologies mediate the relationship space by enabling some ways of relating while making other ways of relating more difficult [3]. An electric toaster requires the use of electricity to use it to make toast. It dictates a small part of the user's energy relationship with their surroundings. Likewise, a two-slice toaster shapes the user's relationship with others around the breakfast table differently than what a four-slice toaster would. It can be fruitful to see our engineering work as fundamental in designing ways in which the user is encouraged to relate to the world. Focusing on the relation shaping character of design, begs us to consider what kinds of relating we ought to be encouraging. It inspires us to seek shalom in and through our work as engineers!

This paper begins to explore the practical implications of seeking first the Kingdom of God in the context of our engineering work by clarifying our view of where we are headed and what we will need to get there. We begin by acknowledging a God-placed human desire, which strives to make things better, as we explore the creational roots of that desire. Next, we dig into the detail of understanding shalom and flourishing from a biblical perspective. This equips us to close the paper by considering what holistic flourishing might look like in the context of a specific engineering example.

### **3.0 In Search of “Better”**

I dare say that everyone is in favor of progress as long as its definition fits their view of what would lead to a better life. Everyone's idea of “better” is shaped by their underlying beliefs about the world and their role in it. This is often referred to as their worldview [4]. These core beliefs guide their choices, often unconsciously, as they go about their daily activities. Humans are culture makers and our choices reflect who or what we value, love, and worship. [5] Our priorities often reveal our definition of the good life and how we think we can get there; they reveal our view of progress.

To a large degree, communities and cultures cohere by sharing a common vision for what constitutes progress and its corresponding definition of “better.” Members of communities tend to have their worldviews shaped by the community's vision for “better,” which in turn acts to reinforce the culture's direction. While there are undoubtedly local variations, American culture is often considered to be predominately driven by an individualistic pursuit of personal gain and self-fulfillment [6]. In the extreme, the individualist, selfishly seeks happiness through acquiring the financial resources and the corresponding freedom, to do what he wants, when he wants, independent of anyone else. According to this view, progress is narrowly defined as whatever facilitates this self-indulgence, regardless of all else. Individualism, as it is lived out by particular people, is rarely expressed or professed this forcefully. More often, self-seeking

tendencies manifest themselves as a culturally acceptable lack of active concern for nearly anyone or anything else. Our culture encourages us to insulate ourselves from the needs around us. It is common, even expected, to seek one's own happiness by doing things and having things that make us feel important, independent, accepted, powerful, secure, successful, and fulfilled. However, seeking meaning in these things is ultimately fruitless, leaving us in want and setting us up to repeat the cycle.

The danger for Christians is clear. Material possessions and comforts are part of God's good creation and can often be legitimately enjoyed and used for His glory. However, if we lack a clear, biblically-based vision of true progress and flourishing, it is easy to passively accept the culture's directives as truth, at which point, these so-called material blessings become stumbling blocks. Our choices reveal our true loves and, based on the brokenness we often leave in our wake, it may be hard to distinguish us from unbelievers. Therefore, it is paramount, particularly in the area of technology which is treated as being on the cutting edge of progress, that Christians have a clear vision for life in God's Kingdom and the flourishing that results. The required vision must enable us to meaningfully engage the everyday world and bring healing and hope as we seek to shed light on the Kingdom of God. We need a biblically-based vision for Kingdom progress.

#### **4.0 Biblical Directives**

God reveals Himself and His will for us through the Bible and through the creation [7]. A vision for responsible action and true progress must therefore align with God's revelation and our role in His Kingdom.

##### *4.1 Image Bearing*

The first chapters of the Bible tell of God's creative handy work in fashioning all "that is." It is there that we first learn that humanity has been created in the image of God and is therefore unique. When I ask my students what they think it means to be created in the image of God, they often identify their creativity or their ability to reason as sure signs of God's likeness. This is the response we might expect from engineering students immersed in the world of design, but it is the same response that has been given by many Christians through the ages. While I agree that these abilities may be part of what it means to be made in the image of God, I believe a more consistent understanding of this biblical principle is put forth by Douglas John Hall in his book *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* [8]. Hall argues that being made in God's image is less about describing what we are and more about helping us to understand what we should be doing. He gives a robust biblical and historical basis for claiming that we have been created to bear God's image by being His representatives to the rest of the creation, including our neighbors. Everything we do is a response to God's call to bear His image. Therefore, all our actions should be in line with His will so that the whole of creation can see and experience God's glory through us. This is beautifully consistent with what we read about Christ in Colossians 1:15, "For He [Christ] is the perfect image of the invisible God" (NIV). This passage is calling our attention to actions rather than attributes. Christ provides the perfect example of what it means to be an obedient image bearer and we are to pattern our lives after His. We are called to be Christ-like in all we do. Therefore, our creativity, our rationality, our desires, and our ability to love, are not the essence of what it means to be created in the image of God, but rather, are gifts from God,

enabling us to be His representatives. Practically speaking, these abilities are the means of our authority to rule over the creation.

#### *4.2 Service Mandate*

As seen in the early chapters of Genesis, being an image bearer points us naturally to our call to be loving stewards. Immediately after being told we are created in the image of God in Genesis 1:27, we are given insight into the nature of this task in the next verse: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” (Gen 1:28, NIV) Notice that God blesses us and gives us authority, or control, over creation so that we can be a blessing. We are to be a blessing by being fruitful, bearing fruit like the rest of creation (Gen1:11-12; 1:17-18; 1:22; 2:9). Humans are to contribute their part to the flowering of creation by using their gifts to subdue the earth and fill it with blessing, revealing God’s glory as responsible image bearers. Richard Mouw explains:

“The command to “fill” the earth here is not merely a divine request that Adam and Eve have lots of babies. The earth was also to be “filled” by the broader patterns of their interactions with nature and with each other.” [9]

Our relationship to the rest of creation, in light of our authority to subdue, is further clarified in Genesis 2:15, “And Jehovah God taketh the man, and causeth him to rest in the garden of Eden, to serve it, and to keep it.” (Young’s Literal Translation) The call issued in these verses is not an edict to indiscriminately develop culture. Based on Cal DeWitt’s study of the Hebrew terms for the phrases “to serve it” and “to keep it” [10], I have argued elsewhere [11] that the command given here is best understood as a call to be of service to the garden by helping it to prosper. We are to be *stewards*.

The role of steward is often narrowly understood as dealing with our use of resources or the environment. However, it is actually much broader, encompassing our whole lives. It is not a separate part of our Christian calling; it is the whole of our walk. Using our unique gifts, each of us is to serve God by dedicating our entire selves to be of service to others and the rest of creation, by enabling them to flourish by becoming what God intended them to be. God has given us freedom and responsibility in our actions and calls us to loving service as we tend to the needs of creation, including our neighbors. For this reason, I have made a habit of referring to these verses as the “Service Mandate,” although the term “Cultural Mandate” is more commonly used.

As God’s perfect image bearer, Christ epitomizes the faithful steward. He teaches:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28, NIV)

Paul echoes these same teachings in Philippians 2:1-11 and also in Galatians 5:13, while Peter instructs us, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (I Peter 4:10, NIV) We glorify God and become more Christ-like when we lovingly give ourselves up in order to assist others and the rest of

creation, to be what God created them to be. God expects us to serve Him by being of service to the whole of creation, enabling it to flourish in every conceivable way.

#### *4.3 Shalom, Flourishing, and the Kingdom of God*

If we are to reveal God's glory and His likeness by being a blessing to others and the rest of creation, then we need to have a clear understanding of what is involved in this flourishing task. We start by describing the relationship between our stewardship task and the Kingdom of God. In the New Testament, Christ teaches that through him the law is fulfilled and God's Kingdom has come, although it is not yet fully revealed. He then calls each of us to be His disciples by seeking first His Kingdom (Matt. 6:33), a kingdom of shalom [1]. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. writes:

“The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets called shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed. ... Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.” [12]

Jonathan Hiskes puts it this way:

“The image of shalom woven through Scripture offers glimpses of creator, humanity, and the earth dwelling in peace...It's a vision marked not by the absence of forbidden acts but by the presence of healthful ones – dancing, singing, feasting, inventing, building, resting – all alongside a God who laughs and plays.” [13]

Shalom, then, is a condition in which everyone and everything is in right relationship all the time [2], where “right relationship” is typified in being a blessing to the other. We are to be a blessing by enabling human and non-human creation to become everything God created them to be. People are to be equipped to use their gifts for service and the rest of creation is to be brought to its full fruition. Harmonious flourishing existed before the fall of Adam and Eve into sin and its complete restoration through Christ was envisioned by Isaiah (Isaiah 11) and John (Revelation 21).

Our flourishing duties certainly involve allowing non-human creation to thrive in all its created diversity, but they also include responsible unfolding or development of the creation through cultural activities, including technology. Through responsible engineering, we make it possible for creation to bring praise to God in ways it could not without human involvement. In keeping with God's plan of shalom, obedient design unfolds creation in such a way that the whole of creation, including humanity, flourishes. Therefore, flourishing is not an end in itself, but is rather a harmonious means of opening up the creation through time as God intended with each specific piece singing its part to His glory. In other words, we can be of service to creation by enabling it to flourish as a growing chorus of praise with ever-increasing diversity. When we steward or serve creation in this way, we cultivate shalom, revealing His Kingdom and bearing His image. When shalom is operative, flourishing results.

#### *4.4 Broken Relationships*

Of course since the fall, the realization of this comprehensive potential for beauty and harmony has been seriously crippled by the work of Satan and the distortion of sin. In the absence of God's grace, the misdirected heart of mankind flees from obedient, loving, selfless service and

instead embraces self-centered autonomy from God. Tragically, we run away from our true image-bearing identity and instead reflect the images of the idols we serve (Psalm 115:4-8). This rebellious choice comes with a high cost. Our relationships with God, with each other, and with the rest of the creation are broken, and fruitfulness is often replaced by barrenness, violence, destruction, and death.

#### *4.5 Redemption and Our Current Task*

But out of love for the cosmos He created, God sent Christ to conquer sin and death restoring our relationship with God and reestablishing His kingship (John 3:16-17). Christ's victory over Satan sets us free to once again serve as God intended. Christ's work restores the possibility of a right relationship with God, but also with each other, and the rest of the creation. By the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, we are prodded and enabled to seek Christ's Kingdom first and to find it. Christ's Kingdom is a kingdom of right relationships: a kingdom of shalom [1]. Although the victory is won, believers are called to continue to wage war against the powers of evil by proclaiming the good news until Christ returns. We are called to be His disciples by seeking first His Kingdom. We bear witness to His kingship by not only verbally proclaiming the gospel but by also bearing the image of the King in everything we do.

“Redeemed humanity is directed to exercise dominion, stewardship, and justice, guided by the mind of Christ. Redeemed humans are not to shun their powers of intellect, creativity, and technique. Rather, they are to use them for the wise and loving management of creation, developing, the full potential of everything in creation – stone, beast, or human – and lifting all of that creation to share in their adoption as sons and daughters of God.” [14]

Embracing our call to steward, we can be of service to others by helping them glimpse Christ's Kingdom as we strive to show the way things are supposed to be in all areas of life, including our design work, “erecting signposts of the Kingdom,” as Goudzwaard says.[15]

Seeking shalom, in a world where many others are not, is an impossible challenge outside of God's grace. Serving and giving of ourselves, while others do not, can feel like a burden stirring our sense of injustice. Therefore, we must daily deny our selfish tendencies and focus on the needs of others (Luke 9:23, 1 John 3:16). In a sin-twisted world, our efforts to be of service can also be misguided, rejected, or futile. Seeking shalom yields blessing but it also inevitably leads to suffering on this side of Christ's return.

#### **5.0 Flourishing as True Progress**

We live in “enemy occupied territory” [16], as C. S. Lewis would say, and our cultural status is not that unlike Israel's during their exile in Babylon. At that time God, through Jeremiah, counseled the Israelites to “seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it flourishes you will flourish.” [17] This verse is not suggesting that we simply acquiesce to the surrounding culture's vision of progress, but rather, we are to be a blessing to those around us, directing them to freedom in Christ through the prosperity and the peace found only in Kingdom living. True progress occurs when we take steps, or encourage others to take steps, that seek shalom in all its wholeness. All other actions lead down paths of destruction. Everything we do is either directed toward the Kingdom and true progress or away from it.



As facilitators of flourishing, it is critical that we understand the full scope of this task as it applies to every moment of every day, including our engineering. We consider the foundation of fruitfulness here and then apply it to a specific engineering example in the following section.

### *5.1 Goal*

Our actions only result in flourishing if they serve our chief end: “to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.”[18] An important implication of this is that seeking shalom and flourishing cannot be a goal in itself. Striving for harmony, love, a healthy environment, or any other good thing in isolation from Christ’s Kingdom, is futile. Flourishing only finds true meaning when done in service to the Creator and to His glory. As the Westminster Catechism makes clear, even our enjoyment which we might be tempted to consider as being self-directed, is to be focused in God. The contrast between seeking shalom and the stereotypical western view of progress, which seeks personal gain and glory, could not be greater. Flourishing occurs when creation in all its fullness brings glory to God by being a blessing. And to be a blessing to another means that they have either been equipped to be a blessing to someone or something else, or they have been enriched in such a way that they can enjoy God more fully.

### *5.2 Motivation*

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” John 3:16-17 (NIV)

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:1-2 (NIV)

If our lives are to be God glorifying, then we must be motivated by a sincere love of the world just as God is (John 3:16, I Cor. 13). Love is a gift from God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, which stirs in us a desire to serve while simultaneously undermining self-centeredness. It is the greatest gift (I Cor. 13:13) because it lays the foundation, enabling all other gifts to be used in grateful service.

### *5.3 Communal*

Flourishing is always communal. Individuals do not flourish, communities do. Efforts that fail to consider the whole of the community will fall short of achieving shalom. The most basic understanding of the communal aspect of our task recognizes the interconnectedness of the creation. All created things exist in context. Everything we do depends on and affects other people and parts of creation, shaping our collective future. This is why humans are called to be of service to the whole of creation. There is a mutual interdependence between God, humanity and the rest of creation. Obviously, the whole creation including humanity depends on God, but mysteriously, it also seems that God has chosen to need us, and loves us deeply. We depend on

creation and each other for sustenance, but also see God's majesty, power, and sustaining care displayed through the beautifully intricate world. Non-human creation needs us to open up its potential and care for it so that it continues to flourish to God's glory. However, sin breaks down our communal relationships. Unable to fully be what it was created to be, the creation groans under the weight of the curse (Romans 8:22). Our treatment of others and the rest of creation is our response to God's call and, therefore, has implications for our relationship with God. Stewards are responsible individually and communally. The interdependent nature of the created order requires a holistic approach to engineering as well as the rest of our activities.

Being aware of this interconnectedness can help us avoid negative impacts, however, the communal aspect of our prospering work goes beyond damage control. It demands that all our actions seek shalom. Flourishing always promotes right relationships. In community we are to love God above all, love our neighbors as ourselves, and care for the rest of creation. However, our call goes beyond just getting our own house in order. It also includes the loving encouragement of others to be good stewards and for them to spur us on.

#### 5.4 Kingdom Knowing

Humans and their managerial responsibilities are woven into the very fabric of creation. As we have seen, these responsibilities involve being of service to our neighbor and the rest of creation by enabling them to be what God intends them to be. However, to serve in this way requires knowledge of God's will; it requires Kingdom knowing. Kingdom knowing is more than just information gathering. It is the mysterious and time consuming, Spirit led work, of knowing in the context of a loving relationship, made meaningful in its connection to the biblical narrative. This type of knowledge leads to wisdom. It is knowing that leads to right action because it is born out of Christ-centered caring. According to Steve Garber, it is the biblical way of knowing:

“What does it mean to ‘know’? If we were to take the Hebrew scripture, from Genesis to Malachi, listening to and learning the way that knowledge is understood, it would come to something like this: *to have knowledge of* means *to have responsibility to* means *to have care for.*” [19] “We must not only know rightly, but do rightly. And we must know and understand and love – at the same time.” [20]

Information becomes meaningful when it is understood in the context of God's call to loving service. This is wisdom forged only while actively seeking first His Kingdom in community.

Kingdom knowing is grounded in God's revelation to us through His written Word and through His creation. We learn to steward by listening to God's Word and by intimately observing creation. Discernment requires transformed hearts and minds that are in tune with God's will so that we can see and love the world as God does and be moved to serve it as Christ does (Roman 12:2).

Kingdom knowing is nurtured with habits that focus on needs beyond our own. By contrast, our culture worships, glorifies, and rewards self-seeking exercised within accepted limits. Ironically, in looking toward ourselves, we turn our back on others and our true identity. My own flourishing, the flourishing of those around me, and the flourishing of the creation within my reach, depend on my continual dying to my selfish self, while embracing my Christ renewed self. Habits of love, concern, and Kingdom-building action begin by getting over ourselves and directing our attention to the whole community that makes up our place. We need to develop a

habit of paying attention day-in and day-out. This kind of seeing requires that we look at the world as Christ does. By grace through the work of the Holy Spirit, we can learn to recognize the brokenness around us and know how best to help. Properly trained, we will see the Spirit at work around us. However, our vision is easily distorted when our own needs and wants take center stage.

A person's ability to recognize brokenness and discord and be able to point to healing and harmony is, to a large extent, determined by his or her view of the world. The human brain is limited in its ability to handle the incredible amount of stimulation it receives from our senses. Therefore, the brain physically filters and assigns meaning to incoming information based on what a person believes to be true about the way the world really is [21]. If something is not important to our understanding of the world or our attention is directed elsewhere, we literally do not see it even though we may be looking right at it [21]. What we notice is determined by our view of what is worth noticing. When our understanding of the world is distorted, so too will be our seeing and our knowing. Further, our knowing of the world contributes to shaping our view of the world and how we try to find meaning in it [21]. Therefore, in light of this feedback loop, it is critical that the truth of God's Word be embedded deep in our hearts compelling us "to love what God loves, to feel what God feels" [22].

The creation responds to the Lord's word for creation in one of two ways. Most creatures respond with compulsory obedience. Rocks respond to God's will for rocks by being rocks, unless ordered (or reordered) to be bread. Water is always water, it seems, unless commanded to become wine. However, humans enjoy limited freedom to choose the nature of their response to the Lord's word. For example, while our living bodies must obey God's word for the physical and biotic aspects of creation, humans have freedom in their response to God's command to love their neighbor. When we have freedom in our response, God's commands are often referred to as norms or divine oughts and we become *response-able*. Every interaction with God, others, and the rest of creation is to be guided by norms. We are to live by God's will. When we ignore God's normative structure, damage and brokenness result. When we are faithful to the will of the Lord, blessing follows (Psalm 19:7-11). However, because of the presence of sin in the world, the blessing that flows from normative action is never complete. Doing the right thing does not result in complete harmony.

God's normative structure is embedded into the very fabric of the universe. As such, unbelievers, by God's grace, are also able to recognize many of its patterns. For example, most cultures recognize that children do best when raised by parents that love and care for them. We have learned that polluting the air we breathe can lead to lung disease and therefore we should avoid doing it. Business owners know they ought to care for their customers if they want to do well. The Bible is loaded with normative wisdom to direct our interactions, but there is also much we need to discern from the world around us. Flourishing requires that we pay close attention to the results of our actions and learn from them. In order to enable my wife to flourish, I have to get to know her. I need to pay attention so that I understand how I can best help her utilize her gifts and overcome her weaknesses as she grows in her walk. Knowing someone or something, then, is not a destination but a journey. It is an ongoing process of care-filled experimenting to learn how best to facilitate prospering. This is not just true of our relationships with others but also applies to our relationship with the rest of creation. For example, we have learned that paint can extend the life of a steel part by protecting it from

corrosion. As we unfold the technological potentials in creation, we need to do so in wisdom that is born out of loving care and a heartfelt commitment to seeking shalom. We can develop normative principles based on biblical and creational revelation [23] but doing God's will is always nuanced by the particulars of time and place. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to consider how seeking shalom is attempted in the context of a specific design example.

## **6.0 Example: Toys for God's Kids [24]**

One of our senior design teams from 2015-2016 worked on a project for the local chapter of Toys for God's Kids (TFGK). TFGK is a national organization that utilizes volunteer labor to produce small wooden cars that are distributed to children in impoverished areas around the world. TFGK's mission is to show God's love through the simple act of giving a handmade toy to children that have very little. Most of the volunteers are retired men that enjoy woodworking. The local chapter approached our engineering students with the hope of improving their toy making process.

Every design project strives to make the world a better place. However, as we have seen, the key is in how we define "better." The students began the project by visiting the toy shop where they were able to observe toys being built, meet some of the workers, and try their hand at some of the production steps. After visiting the shop and developing a relationship via several meetings with the leader of the local chapter, it became clear to the design team that "better" in this case could not simply be about manufacturing efficiency. Even though the organization strives to produce a large number of cars each year and increased production would benefit more children, putting toys in the hands of kids is only part of the flourishing equation. Making the toys is also rewarding work for the retirees. It gives them a common purpose and a place to gather and socialize with others who share their interests. A narrow analysis of the manufacturing process would have likely suggested implementing extensive automation to maximize production. However, the goal of this project was not maximum production but holistic flourishing. Therefore, the students attempted to know their customer and the context of the project through a relationship based on love. This led the design team to recommend a limited amount of automation. They focused on preserving the enjoyable aspects of making the toys while automating some of the more tedious tasks. In addition, the students also sought to improve the aesthetics of the work environment. Most of the edges of the car parts are rounded off using a router. The router is loud and needs to be running most hours of the day. To help mitigate the problem, the team designed a sound dampening attachment for the router. The muffler system significantly reduced noise levels in the shop area, thereby facilitating additional conversation and socializing.

The complete design required knowledge beyond the social habits of these retired wood workers. Knowledge of actuators, controls, the properties of pinewood, the physics of sounds dampening, etc. also informed the details of the design. Design for flourishing demands not only that we pay attention and know the larger context of our projects, but that we also serve in and through the details. Seeking shalom as an engineer requires a holistic approach.

Undoubtedly, this student project fell short of holistic flourishing in many ways. Biblical knowing requires more than just a brief encounter with others and with place, indeed, it continues to mature along with the relationships. However, even with its limitations, I believe

this project illustrates the transformative potential of seeking shalom in and through our design work.

## 7.0 Conclusion and Future Work

Seeking first the Kingdom of God is striving for true progress in all its wholeness; it is seeking shalom and flourishing. We were made and have been remade to seek shalom as we lovingly meet technological needs around us with the goal of flourishing the whole of creation. God is glorified through our care-filled engineering of the creation when it leads to blessing for all aspects of creation. Our engineering work seeks shalom when it is motivated by love for God and neighbor, is guided by Kingdom knowledge of community and place, and results in holistic flourishing.

By sketching out a biblical foundation for seeking shalom and flourishing, this paper intends to set the stage for future work which will consider the implications of this task as it pertains to the day-to-day work of engineers. “Seeking first the Kingdom of God,” “using your gifts and talents to God’s glory,” “seeking shalom and flourishing,” are phrases that become particularly meaningful when put into practice. Engineers need to be concerned about the broad implications of their efforts, but they also need to be obedient in their handling of the details. In this paper I have tried to articulate a broad, biblically-based perspective on engineering, but I hope that I have also developed sufficient groundwork to facilitate wrestling, in future papers, with the nitty-gritty detail of seeking shalom in and through our daily work as engineers.

## 8.0 Endnotes

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- [18] Question and Answer 1 from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.
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- [20] Garber, p. 90.
- [21] Kevin Ashton, *How to Fly a Horse: The Secret History of Creation, Invention, and Discovery*, Doubleday, New York, 2015, p. 107 – 110.
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- [24] Nick Arkema, Monte De Kam, Josh Meinders, “Toys for God’s Kids: Improvement of Manufacturing Process – Final Design Report,” April 14, 2016, Engineering Department, Dordt College, Sioux Center, IA.