

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

Thesis

By examining the biblical themes of Cosmic Geography, this paper contends that the Christian life is not one of achieving God's purposes through personal fitness or ability, but of participating in Christ's mission through faithful dependence on His power, thereby rejecting the influence of the rulers and powers of this present age.

Before we Begin

The things discussed in this paper are going to be paradoxical in nature; they may come across as absurd on the surface but once willing to entertain these ideas, they begin to make more sense. They are not only paradoxical in nature, but they may also shift your paradigm.

What is a paradigm shift? A Paradigm shift is defined as an important change that happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way. I would argue that everything we learn from the Lord should in some way shift our paradigm. And that the Lord has been shifting the paradigms of His people from the beginning.

We all know the pattern of God's people who went before us. We learn through the story of Scripture how they were delivered by the hand of God; they grumble against the hand of God and often returned to captivity by denying the hand of God. Because of this God was constantly having to call out His people's wayward ways, we must not think we are any different.

To turn the people back to being oriented toward Yahweh as their God, the prophets did not challenge God's people to simply behave better, they challenged them to consider their ways. To consider your way naturally becomes paradoxical because it forces you to abandon the way you have believed to be correct, to go a way that feels unknown and uncertain.

Taught by the Lord

Understanding the influence of Cosmic Geography on our lives is not something we can explore by our own wisdom gained through our own effort. We know from Scripture that we are meant to live life in participation with Jesus and living in participation with Him is to

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

interact with Him, and to interact with Him is to inquire of Him. He wants us to have questions, but He also wants us to seek Him for the answers.

This does not mean that we learn from Christ by sitting in a room helplessly waiting for answers to be downloaded into our brain. Learning from and being led by the Lord is an interactive experience, and part of the process is letting Him show us how to be taught by Him. In the Unseen Realm course at AWKNG, Heiser talks about how those who wrote the Bible did so in participation with Him within the scope of the world they lived in. That is reflective of how Christ teaches us, He will use the physical things we experience daily, in other words, the tangible things of this world, to teach and train us up in the intangible ways of the kingdom. So it is together with Christ that we explore the cosmic reality of the world we live in, to be taught more about who we are meant to be and how we are meant to function within that reality.

In the Beginning

Interacting this way with the Lord is how I have come to draw the conclusions I will present in this presentation. But first let me provide some context of who I am, I am a personal trainer who years ago asked the Lord a question. I asked Him how we train the body different in light of the truth that it is a temple of the Holy Spirit? This question led me on a journey that I could have never imagined. It has consisted of twist and turns, and ups and downs, which have all led me to this very moment. I am beyond honored to be standing here today to share what the Lord has taught me through my life circumstances, through the work of scholars like Dr. Michael Heiser, and through challenges presented to me by the Lord that were used to grow my ability to live by faith.

Be Strong in the Lord

I am owner of the 610Fit Academy and Training Center, but early on in my journey I had the 610Fit Training Studio. This was your everyday personal training studio, as I did not yet understand what the Lord was doing. The idea behind the concept of 610Fit is to learn to be strong in the Lord, it comes from Ephesians 6:10, be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. To be honest, I also had no understanding of what it truly meant to be strong in Him. One time a lady asked what it meant to 610Fit and I had to humbly admit that I was not sure. I knew I could answer the question in my current understanding of being in prayer and asking the Lord for help in my circumstances, but that did not seem like the right answer. The Lord had me surrender to the notion that I could not answer the question with certainty therefore I had to humbly admit I did not know.

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

Not long after that, I was sitting in my studio asking the Lord to help me understand, what it was He was doing at 6:10 and what it meant to be strong in the Lord. At the very moment I was asking the question my eyes raised up to a note one of my clients had given me, it was pinned on my wall above a light switch. It was Psalm 46:10 and it was written out line by line. It said, be still and know that I am God, be still and know, be still, be. After I read it the 6:10 in Psalm 146:10 stood out. It was a light bulb moment with the Lord, and I knew it was significant. It was in that moment that I heard the quiet voice of the Lord whisper that I was here to train up soldiers for Christ.

We often read this verse and relate it to having a peaceful quiet time or being still before the Lord, but I soon learned that this was not a correct reading of this verse. When you read the entire chapter of Psalm 46 you begin to see the significance of verse 10 and how the chapter reveals some of what it is to be strong in the Lord. I am not going to touch on all the key points within this chapter, but I want to highlight a few verses to move us forward in our thinking.

Psalm 46:1 says that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Here we see that it is God who is our strength and that He is our help in trouble. This led me to ask another question. Does learning to rely on our strength to help ourselves out of trouble challenge our ability to let the Lord be our strength, trusting in His ability to help us out of trouble?

As my understanding has increased concerning the cosmic battle before us, I have concluded that we truly do not understand the trouble we face. We view trouble as danger to our life or a threat to the loss of resources we have built up to keep our life free from trouble. And we often view spiritual warfare as the forces that come against us, keeping us from attaining the endeavors we pursue. But the real trouble we face is the intelligent, territorial cosmic forces of evil, the rulers and principalities of the heavenly realm whose scheme is to distract us from completing the tasks we must do as God's people. That task is the Great Commission and the reclaiming of the nations, and it will be accomplished by the Great Reversal. As the kingdom of God increases, the kingdom of darkness decreases, it is a battle for territory, and we are the territory. Dr. Heiser taught us about this type of spiritual warfare and how the tactic of the gods of the nations is to delay their ultimate demise. If we do not fully understand the trouble we have before us, how can we battle it with our own strength?

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

Psalms 46:8-9 says, Come, behold the works of the Lord, how He has brought desolations on the earth, He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; He burns the chariots with fire. The Faithlife Study Bible comments on these verses by stating that the psalmist encourages the congregation to examine the works of Yahweh. He uses imagery of weapons to show Yahweh's power over enemy nations. By looking at Yahweh's military power, the people can have confidence, knowing that Yahweh is their refuge.

These verses are also a good reminder that it is not how strong we are that matters but instead, it is the strength of our God that matters. Of course, this opens the door for another question. Does focusing our attention on our personal strength and ability train us to keep our eyes on who we are rather than on Christ's strength and who He is? If so, what are the implications of that?

If we then move to verse 10 which is the be still and know I'm God verse, we see that 'be still' is the term *raphah* which means 'to release' or 'let go'. The Faithlife Study Bible says that God commands the forces of chaos and the nations to stop their raging and recognize Him as God. Dr. Heiser's work allows us to understand Psalm 46 including verse 10 and its relationship to why we must become strong in the Lord. When we realize who it is we are battling, who our God is within the battle, and how we are called to function with Him in battle, we can begin to see the scheme of those who oppose Yahweh. They scheme to distract us from becoming strong in the Lord.

The scheme of the rulers, principalities and powers of the heavenly realm that oppose God's people is also to distract us from becoming who God created us to be, thereby enabling us to do what God created us to do. This could be implemented by focusing our attention on who it is we are becoming in the world rather than who are as part of the kingdom in participation with God. Why would they bother with this tactic? Because we are significant in bringing the battle to a conclusion and we can only do it in Christ. He is the ultimate Divine Warrior and while victory was achieved on the cross, there is work to do.

To function as the people of God, we need to begin to see that we are the people of God. We must begin to shift from living with an individualist mindset to participating in the collective mindset. We must realize that we are an extension of those in Hebrews 11 whose lives reflected their ability to live by faith. Hebrews 11:39-40 connects us to them, it says.

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Hebrews 12 then leads with a call to action.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

If we are walking the same path as God's people who went before us then we need to understand our role within the larger view of scripture, and the training necessary to accomplish our role. God's people are the rescue plan of the nations, but they were never fit for the task. They failed time after time at living in proper union with Yahweh as their God, instead they turned from trusting Yahweh to trusting in idols. Christ is the only one who is fit for the task and that means that it is only by trusting in the fitness of Christ that we become fit for the work of being the people of God. The process of surrendering our fitness for Christ's fitness is the way we become strong in the Lord. These truths lead me to a surprising conclusion, we as the righteous people of God, are called to live by faith over fitness. What we have before us are two opposing systems, ways of functioning, that are like oil and water, they do not mix. This is why we must consider our ways.

Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Habakkuk 2:4

Faith over Fitness

And now we come to the part of the presentation that when taken at face value sounds absurd. And might even stir up some unwelcome feelings. After all, our lives are rooted in fitness, and many of us experience or have experienced the presence of the Lord in the very place of participating in fitness. Please don't forget that I am a personal trainer. So before we begin, let's take a minute and remember who our God is.

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

He is a God who loves us, and desires to meet us where we are at. He also chooses to use the things that come against us for our good and His glory. Because of whom He is, we can search for truth in the uncertainty, knowing that if He is asking us to consider our ways, then He will faithfully teach us how to change our ways.

Heading into the mystery of the unknown, liminal space, while it can seem overwhelming, it holds the potential to be the greatest thing we have ever experienced. Just like the Israelites when delivered out of Egypt were led into the wilderness to learn what it meant to be in covenant relationship with Yahweh, so God desires to lead us into liminal space to learn how to live in covenant relationship with Him as our God. Why is venturing into liminal space necessary? Because it is the place of transition and transformation, the place where we live in the world, but we are not of the world, and in it we function by a different system, faith.

Fitness as a System

To understand fitness as a system, we need to divorce it from exercise. Exercise is not fitness and fitness is not exercise. The reason the terms have become interchangeable is because by exercising we increase our physical strength which makes us fit for the tasks of the world. We use fitness, not just to become physically strong, but also to increase our mental and emotional fitness as well. We use these strengths to attain the things that we desire to accomplish in our lives; we use it to make a name for ourselves.

When contemplating these ideas, we need to be reminded who we are in Christ as God's family, we are a new creation and as a new creation we have a new status, and in that status, we no longer live as who we were as gentiles, living in participation with the rulers and principalities, we no longer live by the ways of the world, but we live fully surrendered to the task we have before us. And Dr. Heiser said it best in the episode #35 of the Naked Bible Podcast. In this episode he brought to our attention the job we have to do as God's people and then stated that we need to live like we have a job to do. What if exercise can be repurposed to prepare us for the job we have, and to train us to run the race set before us? What if it can be used for the glory of God rather than our own glory? What if God wants to repurpose it to show us how we participate with Him by conforming to His image instead of creating our own desired image to portray to the world? What if, we really can use all our strength to love God because He will faithfully provide His for life in this world?

The definition of fitness and fit according to the Oxford Dictionary is as follows.

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

Fitness: to be of suitable standard quality or type to meet the required purpose.

Fit: is of suitable quality standard or type to fulfill the required purpose or task.

These definitions should remind us that it is only Christ who is fit for the task and purposes we have before us as God's people. He is the standard, and we are not called to live by the standards of the world, but by who Christ is as the standard. We are no longer a part of the world, we have been brought out of the world and into the kingdom, and now we have a new purpose, a new purpose requires us to live by a new way and to live a new way we need a new system. The system that we must abandon is fitness and the system we must adopt is faith. Fitness relies on our ability to try to overcome obstacles by trusting in our strength, but faith trusts in who Jesus is and learns to yield to our weakness until He provides His strength to overcome the obstacles before us. This does not mean we are passive but rather that we are taught how to actively wait on Him and this enables us to learn how to perceive His presence that moves us from within.

Now I know the questions that may be moving around in your head right now because I have had them too. One question we can address is this, how do you care for your body if you do not participate in fitness, how do you eat healthy if you do not try to eat healthy? To look for this answer, let's go to Matthew 6:25-33.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than mere clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Do you see what is being shown to us?

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

In Matthew, He tells us not to be anxious about our body or what we eat or drink. How do we process this out? Let's think about what it really means to be anxious. In our minds anxiousness is often seen as an unnecessary feeling experienced when we worry about something out of our control, but we never think of anxiousness as the motivation behind seeking out something that feels like it must be in our control like caring for our body or seeking out what we will eat or drink. Those all come across as things we are to do because of the gift of life we have been given. We often see them as the responsibilities we have, and that by fulfilling these responsibilities, we honor God in our body. But we see in verse 32 of Matthew chapter 6 that the things we think of as our responsibility are seen as something the gentiles, those under the authority of the gods of the nations, must seek after, and then it is clearly stated that God is our Father and knows we need all those things. These verses when read in the context of living by faith over fitness, begin to develop into a beautiful realization of just who God is desiring to be in relationship with us. I first asked the Lord how we train the body differently in light of the truth that we are a temple of the Holy Spirit because it didn't seem right that it was such a burden to care for our body. After all, the Lord delivers us from burdens so how could our body, His dwelling be such a burden?

Now let's look at exercise. Here is the big question. How could exercise be a bad thing? First off, it is not, exercise is not the problem but rather the problem is the way we exercise. When I was processing all of this with the Lord, I asked Him how I could teach this message to others? Everything I had learned from this point was taught to me through my story and while our stories are important, I felt something was missing. I always went to Dr. Heiser's work to confirm what I was learning within my life's journey, but I couldn't understand how I could ever share all my stories to explain how I had been led to these conclusions.

As I was contemplating this with the Lord, the still small voice of the Spirit led me to look up the origins of fitness. What showed up was the term gymnasium and its definition, which was a place to exercise naked. Upon further investigation I learned of the ancient Olympics and how the warriors would use exercise to shape and strengthen their bodies to display their strength before the gods. With the work of Dr. Heiser in mind, you can see how this is a problem. The relationship the people had with the gods of the nations was not like the relationship we have with Yahweh. We are never called to demonstrate our strength before Him, rather we are called to trust in who He is and His love for us. We see this truth in Psalm 147:10-11

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor His pleasure in the legs of man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.

Psalm 147:10-11

This leads us to another question we must ask. Has the system of fitness been implemented on a grand scale to keep us in an unrealized state of displaying our strength before the gods? And have the gods gone behind the curtain so that we are now fooled into believing that the way we exercise and function is normal and necessary? These are the questions that loomed in my mind. So back to the term gymnasium, after I read the definition and discovered its ties to the time of Paul and the ancient games, the Lord spoke again. He said, "my children are exercising naked." I then landed in Revelation 16:15.

("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

The Faithlife Study Bible describes the idea of being naked and exposed as part of being taken captive by opposing armies. It states that in the Ancient Near East, conquering armies often paraded prisoners of war naked and exposed them to as much shame as possible. Now we know that when we exercise, we are not losing our clothing, but what if, within the cosmic reality of the world, the way we are exercising is stripping us of our garments prepared for us in Christ.

Let's take a deeper look at the gymnasium. If you look at the gymnasiums in those times, they are not like ours, they taught more than just exercising, they taught a way of life, it is not the exercising that is the problem, but the way of life attached to the exercising. Fitness while it has morphed throughout the years is a system of the gymnasium, it is a belief system that trains the body, mind and emotions via self-discipline, for self-sufficiency, but we must learn to only rely on Christ's sufficiency. If we go back even further to the time of the Maccabean Revolt, we can see again how the gymnasium is a part of an attack on the temple and God's people. I want to preface here that I am not pretending to have some end times revelation, I am simply pointing out what those who have gone before us have faced and asking what that means for us now.

All throughout Daniel, we see the idea of the abomination of desolation. Daniel 8:13 states, Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke. "For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot? The Faithlife Study Bible connects the idea of the abomination of desolation to Antiochus IV. In 1 Maccabees 1:54; and 2 Maccabees 6:2 we hear about Antiochus IV erecting an altar to Zeus over the existing altar in the temple and he also built a gymnasium. What was his motive? He desired to distract God's people from studying and living out the laws of Moses. By building the gymnasium, they were forced to exercise naked, exposing their circumcision and Antiochus made the temple desolate by stopping sacrifice and worship. What if we look at these things in light of the truth that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of the Lord, both individually and collectively. To do that, let's ask another question, what does sacrifice and worship look like now in light of who we are?

I appeal to you therefore, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

Could the system of fitness be disabling us from presenting our bodies, our whole selves, to the Lord as a living sacrifice? Afterall, this is our spiritual worship. Could the system of fitness be leading us to sacrifice our bodies to being conformed to the ways of the world, with the intent of directing our hearts toward our own desires, thereby satisfying our own will? If so, would this be an abomination to the Lord that makes desolate?

Remembering in all of this is the reality that we have a job to do, and that job can only be accomplished through trusting in the fitness of Christ. Just as Dr. Heiser once said, "let's live like we have a job to do." If we are going to give our lives fully to the work of the Lord then it is time to consider our ways.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord." Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much and harvested little. You eat but never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord.

Cosmic Geography's Influence on the Way we Live

Jenny Higginbotham

You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? Declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.

Haggai 1:2-9

I think Andrew Murray sums it up best in a quote from his book *Abide in Christ*.

Cease looking at the old you and complaining of weakness; for would God give you something you are unfit for?