

# **Understanding the African Cultural Experience**

A Biblical Counselling Case Study in Participating  
Gauteng Evangelical Churches

## **Purpose, Ethics, Requirements and Consent Form**

An Autonomous Research Project

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# Purpose, Ethics, Requirements and Consent Form

## 1. Introduction

Dear Participant,

My name is **Alan Lester** (the researcher), the counselling pastor at Living Hope Church in Pretoria ([livinghopechurch.co.za](http://livinghopechurch.co.za)). I can be contacted at [admin@whitesdontget.com](mailto:admin@whitesdontget.com).

**Thank you** for considering joining me in this research project. I am convinced that this project will help Christians among the **Gauteng evangelical churches** to understand each other better in our multicultural environment. I believe it will create and deepen relationships between us and make us more useful to Christ in his church because the gospel will become more beautiful among us.

**This document will explain** (1) the **purpose** of the research, (2) the **ethics** of the research, (3) what this research will **require** of you as a participant, and (4) that your **informed consent** is necessary if you choose to participate.

The place for your **signature** is **section 5.1 on page 6**.

I appreciate your eagerness to **help me to understand you**.

## 2. The Purpose of this Research

As a white biblical counsellor, I would like to understand you as an African member of a Gauteng evangelical church. Specifically, I would like to understand what it is about your African cultural experience that you believe white people do not understand.

I would like to spend a lot of time listening well to you in (1) a private online forum, (2) in personal interviews and (3) in your feedback on my conclusions.

I intend to think about what I learn through this research inside of the frameworks of cultural theology and biblical counselling. I intend to describe the process by which a white counsellor came to understand a facet of your African cultural experience. I would like to publish helpful articles on what I have learned, in the Journal of Biblical Counseling and

also write literature that will help pastors, biblical counsellors and church members understand your African cultural experience. I would also like to be able to speak on these issues.

My purpose is to *understand* you and to describe that understanding to other people who need to understand. My purpose is to work toward a new measure of cross-cultural *unity* in our churches so that we can devote ourselves more fully to the tasks of worshipping God, shepherding our people and one-another, and evangelising those who are still lost, in our generation.

### **3. The Ethics of this Research**

I have put effort into protecting you in this research. My main goals in this ethics policy are (1) to clearly identify myself and my purpose, (2) to minimise risk of harm to you and me, (3) to receive your informed consent on everything I do with the information you provide, (4) to protect your identity and personal information, (5) to show that I have avoided deception in this research, (6) to assure you that you have the right to withdraw as a participant at any stage of the research and the right to withdraw any personal information you have shared, and (7) to show you what recourse you have if you believe I have not conducted myself in an ethical way in this research. In other words, this research will not pose a greater threat to you than normal life.

The ethics policy is quite long, so I have included it as **appendix 1** at the end of this form. Please read it to make sure you agree to it before consenting to take part in this research. I will assume that if you give your consent to participate in this research that you have read and agree with the ethics policy.

### **4. What this Research Will Require from You as a Participant**

If you choose to participate in this research, these are the four activities it will require from you:

#### **4.1 Participation in the Private Online Forum**

What it means to participate in this research is to (1) **agree** to the terms in this purpose, ethics, requirements and consent form, (2) to **sign up** for a free account at the

whitesdontget.com private online forum, and (3) to **contribute** to the discussion on the forum.

For **approximately one year** (2021), the forum will be discussing what you personally believe white people do not understand about your African cultural experience. This is a place to be heard. The forum will be **moderated** so no hostile comments will be accepted, only that which is helpful for building each other up. But at the same time, it will be a place where you can **be very straight and honest** about your own perspective.

If you struggle to express yourself well in words, you will be invited to share other **media**, such as particular songs, articles, blogs, movies, sermons, books, etc, with the researcher privately, if you believe those other people's words express your personal experience better than you can. The researcher will ask what in particular you are pointing out in this media.

After the forum has gathered **sufficient data**, it will take a pause to enable the researcher to think about what he has learned. The forum will then be activated again, during 2022, for a time of feedback on the researcher's summaries and analysis of what he has come to understand. As a participant your role as an African church member is to help me as a white South African biblical counsellor to understand what you believe I do not understand about you.

#### **4.2 Encouraging Others to Participate in the Private Online Forum**

This forum is a perfect opportunity for you to say what is on your heart. But you may also know another African member of a Gauteng evangelical church who has something to say. As a participant, you will be welcome to spread the word about this new forum among members of other Gauteng evangelical churches. But this forum is not for everyone, so please only invite people who are (1) African (black), (2) who are considered official *members* of, (3) Gauteng, (4) evangelical churches. The forum sign-up will ask for your pastor's name so that a check can be made if necessary.

#### **4.3 Engaging in One-on-One Interviews with the Researcher if Invited**

During the time the private online forum is active, the researcher will be looking for participants who show particular insight into the African cultural experience and will

approach them privately for one-on-one interviews. These interviews will be semi-structured. That means that the researcher will be asking the same questions that are asked on the forum, regarding your African cultural experience, and will give you opportunity to freely explain your perspective. If the researcher invites you to participate in such an interview, you are at liberty to decline if you would prefer not to be interviewed.

The researcher will also seek out pastors of Gauteng evangelical churches, regardless of their ethnicity, and interview them about their pastoral understanding of the African cultural experience. In addition, the researcher will be approaching all of the ACBC-certified biblical counsellors in South Africa for interviews, in order to come to understand how they understand the African cultural experience and how they have addressed it in a biblical counselling context.

#### **4.4 Praying for a God-Honouring Outcome to this Research**

As a participant in this research, I will be asking you, please, to keep praying for this whole research project. Ask God to (1) make African people in Gauteng evangelical churches enthusiastic about it, (2) bring together the people he desires to participate, (3) make the forum and interviews a joy and blessing to every participant, (4) guide the accumulation of data in the forum and interviews, (5) help the researcher to truly understand and care, (6) help the researcher to accurately and insightfully analyse the gathered data, (7) provide a fruitful time of feedback on the forum, (8) help the researcher to write well on what he has come to understand through this research, (9) use the written material that emerges from this research to bring about true nearness in cross-cultural relationships within the Gauteng evangelical churches, and (10) that this research will lead to better equipping of pastors, biblical counsellors and church members, in the South African context. These are suggestions; you are of course welcome to pray for far more.

### **5. Informed Consent**

This research will require you to agree to the following two terms before becoming a participant. (1) You know who is conducting this research and that you understand and are in agreement with the purpose and ethics that have been explained here. You also understand what becoming a participant will require of you. (2) You agree to avail yourself of the process explained in the ethics policy if you come to believe that the researcher has acted contrary to the ethical policy that governs this research.

There are **three ways** to indicate your informed consent:

1. When you sign up as a participant on the private online forum at whitesdontget.com, the platform will not permit you to create an account if you have not agreed to the terms of this document. **So, by creating a free user account on the forum, you are actively indicating your informed consent to all of the conditions in this document.** This document will be available for you to read and consider, on the home page of the forum, before you sign up for an account.
2. If you are privately invited to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, this form will be provided to you before the interview for your consideration. If you agree with the terms of the interview, you will be required to either sign the form or state your agreement in the audio or video recording of the interview. You will be given the choice. The point is that informed consent will be required before any data is gathered in any interaction in this research project.
3. You are welcome to make your informed consent clear at any point by downloading this form from whitesdontget.com, signing it and returning it to [admin@whitesdontget.com](mailto:admin@whitesdontget.com).

## 5.1 My Informed Consent

I, (first and last name) \_\_\_\_\_,  
a member of (church) \_\_\_\_\_,  
have read and understood this document that describes the purpose, ethics and requirements of this research project, and I hereby **voluntarily** agree to participate in this research under these conditions.

Would you like your **contribution** to this research to be acknowledged by name?

Yes or  No

May the researcher use **direct quotes** from your contributions to the forum or interviews?  Yes or  No

If you have consented to the researcher using **direct quotes** from your contribution to the forum or interviews, would you like to be **acknowledged by name** as the owner of those quotes?  Yes or  No

## **6. Appendix 1: Research Ethics Policy**

### **6.1 The Rights of the Autonomous Researcher**

The researcher possesses the autonomous rights, under section 16.1 of the Constitution of South Africa, to (1) freedom of expression, (2) receive and impart information and ideas, (3) freedom in academic research, and (4) to disseminate research results. These rights will not be exercised, in this research project, in such a way as to violate the limitations of sections 16.2 or 36. The final burden of maintaining ethical standards rests upon the researcher who will conduct himself with the dignified character expected of a biblical counselling pastor and conservative evangelical church elder. In keeping with this ethical commitment, the researcher will not use the results of this research to harm any of the participants but only to (1) gain insight into the African cultural experience by (2) analysing the data inside of the framework of Biblical Counselling and (3) publishing those results in an academic report, in academic journal articles and in other forms of media (4) for the advancement of Biblical Counselling in South Africa and beyond.

### **6.2 Minimising the Risk of Harm**

The risk of harm, in this research, to researcher, moderators and participants is minimal. It does not exceed the risks of normal life. In contrast, the benefits are generous and make this research viable and desirable. The greatest risk factor is that some of the voluntary participants will likely be legal refugees. I will first show how I plan to attenuate the potential risk of harm to participants and then describe some of the benefits of this research. The following protections mitigate the minimal risk level:

(1) Data gathered will only include personal opinions that focus on cultural perspectives. No sensitive data, such as sexual issues or criminal activities will be required from participants. (2) Refugees will be required to confirm that they reside legally in South Africa. Accounts and data from those found to be illegal will be removed from the research database. (3) This research will not involve participants who require gatekeeper

permission, or who are younger than 18 years of age, or who are incapable of giving informed consent. (4) No data will be gathered without the participants' knowledge or consent. The research purpose and methodology is clearly explained on the forum website and in the participant *Purpose, Ethics, Requirements and Consent* form. (5) No audio or online video recording of participants will be made without the participant's consent and even then will only be used privately for transcription purposes.

(6) This is non-medical, non-experimental research and will not involve testing of substances, human tissue or animals. (7) No reward incentives or compulsion will be applied to participants. The costs of the research are borne by the researcher. (8) This research is socially responsible and cognisant of the Justinian principle of justice *suum cuique tribuere*. (9) The researcher and moderators commit to pre-censoring forum comments that contain inappropriate content, with the aid of filtering software. Thus human dignity, equality and freedom are upheld. (10) The researcher is legally obliged to become a mandatory reporter if he becomes aware of illegal activity, such as child abuse, while working on this forum. (11) Invitations to one-on-one interviews will be extended privately by the researcher without the knowledge of other forum participants or moderators.

This research will benefit the South African biblical counselling community by (Constitution 16.2; 36):

(1) Adding to the credibility of the discipline of Biblical Counselling in South Africa, (2) Helping white Biblical Counselling students who do not understand the African cultural experience and the nuances this understanding should bring to a predominantly western-developed counselling movement, (3) Opening up a range of new research possibilities for Biblical Counselling students in South Africa, (4) Further expanding the capacity of Biblical Counsellor training in South Africa to accommodate postgraduate students who desire to advance beyond their master's degree, (5) Leading to the development of additional books, training courses, seminars, and other helpful media designed to help people to both understand the African cultural experience and interact with it in a welcoming manner,

(6) Benefiting the individual African counsellee through the greater understanding he/she encounters in the biblical counsellor, (7) Significantly reducing prejudice between black and white individuals who both desire to be understood and appreciated, (8) Helping the participating Gauteng evangelical churches to identify and remedy intercultural



insensitivities, (9) Adding to the diversity of research in the Biblical Counselling community both in South Africa and internationally, (10) Most importantly, helping to analyse African cultural issues intensively in the light of Scripture for the benefit of multicultural South African churches, to enable them to worship God more fully in this context.

### **6.3 Gaining Informed Consent**

The front page of the whitesdontget.com research forum clearly states that it is a research forum, as will the interview consent and indemnity forms. Forum membership will not be permitted nor interviews conducted without participant informed consent. Terms of consent will include sufficient information on what is expected of participants, risks, the methods and purpose of the research and how the research data will be used, and will be available to read before participants apply for forum membership. Such application is entirely voluntary with no coercion.

### **6.4 Protecting Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The researcher will make every effort to maintain anonymity and confidentiality at three levels. (1) Handling data securely, (2) anonymising data sufficiently, and (3) publishing research results.

Participants in the whitesdontget.com private forum are anonymous, known only by a self-chosen username and generic avatar (no profile photos will be permitted). The researcher alone has access to personally identifiable data.

Whitesdontget.com is SSL encrypted and spam-protected. Backups and research data are stored entirely on an off-site, encrypted, invisible cloud server and are only accessed through the researcher's personal, password-protected computer, through either the password-protected S3 client or web portal. The passwords are only accessible to the researcher. Interview audio is recorded on the researcher's personal recording device, kept on his person, then uploaded at the first opportunity to the data server. Recordings of video call interviews are similarly uploaded to the secure cloud server. Original audio and video are then deleted from the recorder and computer. Data is only opened on the researcher's computer while in use.

All personal identifiers, such as names, church names, email addresses, personal websites, physical addresses, names of people they mention in posts, personally identifying details from their history such as school, university, or seminary names, names of employing organisations, will be removed from the original data texts or transcripts before analysis begins. Data such as age-group, gender, living environment (e.g. township, city, suburb) may be retained if sufficient anonymity can be achieved through careful results aggregation. This same anonymity will be preserved when the findings of this research are published in the research report, in journal articles, or in books or other media that grow out of them. Participants may request in writing to have their contribution acknowledged.

### **6.5 Avoiding Deceptive Practises**

This research will not employ deceptive practices or the concealment of the research agenda. The researcher will be clearly identified, along with all other aspects of the research. Transparency is necessary in this project.

### **6.6 Providing the Right to Withdraw**

Participants retain the right to withdraw both their involvement and their data contributions at any stage of the research. Participants who withdraw will not be coerced to remain.

### **6.7 Risk Responses**

The researcher is aware of the potential for interpersonal conflict in this research. His response will be to: (1) Provide and adhere to a clear five-point ethical policy from the start. (2) Manage evolving ethical concerns in conjunction with my academic consultants. (3) Welcome participants to raise ethical complaints with the pastoral team at Living Hope Church Pretoria. Because biblical counselling—the orientation of this research—is legitimately a function of the church, it is appropriate that complaints are sensitively dealt with inside of the church environment. (4) Provide legal protection for the researcher should a participant not be satisfied with the church's efforts to bring peace. (5) Provide limited public liability insurance (Two million ZAR in total) for the settlement of successful legal claims against the researcher.