

The Inherent Conflict Model: Human Desire, Biblical Perspective, and the Necessity of Renewal

Nicodemus Samson BESKA

PHD Candidate

Institute of Governance and Development Studies

Nassarawa State University, Keffi

Obi Ndifon Neji, PhD

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution

University of Calabar

Abstract

Conflict is an element of the human condition and arises from the interplay between desire, moral failure, and social interaction. This study employed a conceptual and exploratory research design aimed at constructing a theoretical model rather than collecting primary empirical data. The study critically synthesizes existing literature, theories of human behaviour, and conflict studies to present the Inherent Conflict Model, which roots human conflict at the intersection of innate tendencies towards self-interest and the need for moral restraint. The model posits that the heart is inherently inclined toward evil, and desire is limitless. The essay integrates some recent theological, psychological, and evolutionary studies with classical philosophy to provide a multidimensional understanding of conflict. Ultimately, the model advocates for self-evaluation and the renewal of the mind, both spiritually and ethically, as a pathway forward in mitigating human conflict.

Keywords: Inherent Conflict Model, Human Desire, Biblical Insight and Necessity of Renewal

Introduction

Conflict is omnipresent and can be seen in human relations, systems' oppression, and international conflicts. The Inherent Conflict Model offers a new theoretical perspective by situating conflict within the dynamic interaction between internal human desires and external environmental factors. The model is built on three universal assumptions: First, human beings possess inherent tendencies shaped by strong personal desires. Second, that individual consistently seeks to satisfy these desires, sometimes at the expense of social, moral, or

institutional constraints; and third, that conflict emerges when these internal motivations encounter unfriendly or hostile external conditions.

Scripture emphasizes that the root of this conflict lies within the human heart. Mark 7:21-23 states, "For from within the heart of men come evil thoughts... all these evil things come from within and defile a person. Likewise, Jeremiah 17:9-10 declares, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Genesis 6:5-6 further observes, "The Lord saw the wickedness that had occurred in and among mankind. The wickedness had reached to and spread throughout the whole earth, that every idea in every heart of mankind is only evil" These passages provide a theological anchor for the claim that conflict is not merely circumstantial but intrinsic to human nature.

Modern scholarship verifies the above-mentioned view. As Tsegaw (2024) argues, the tendency of man to sin is real and continuous, and according to Green (2022), original sin is maturational and cognitive in nature, with human tendencies toward self-interest and conflict enduring from generation to generation. The process of moral and spiritual regeneration involves overcoming these tendencies, a process Wolfe (2024) examines in some detail. Modern psychology also validates internal conflict as a universal experience: even generally considered positive personality traits possess dark sides that, when they come into play in interactions between people, may provoke social strife. (Current Psychology, 2023)

Therefore, the Inherent Conflict Model brings biblical insight, together with modern scholarship and classical philosophy, to explain the cyclic process of desire, conflict, reflection, and renewal. It positions human strife as inevitable and at the same time addressable through intentional moral and spiritual engagement. This study employed a conceptual and exploratory research design aimed at constructing a theoretical model rather than collecting primary empirical data. The design critically synthesises existing literature, theories of human behaviour, and conflict studies to justify the conceptual development of the Inherent Conflict Model.

This study is to conceptually develop and articulate the Inherent Conflict Model, a theoretical framework that explains how internal human predispositions—particularly the persistent drive to fulfil personal desires—interact with external environmental factors to trigger conflict. It provides scholars, policymakers, and practitioners with a conceptual tool for understanding why

conflict emerges and how interventions can be designed to address both intrinsic human tendencies and structural conditions.

Understanding the Inherent Conflict Model

Conflict is one of the most pervasive characteristics exhibited by humanity, and the search for its origin remains a primary concern for peace studies, psychological, and behavioral sciences. The Inherent Conflict Model envisioned in this paper attempts to provide a new paradigm because it positions conflict as a function of the interplay between innate human desires and external conditions. The proposed model assumes that human beings embody certain innate dispositions due to their strongest personal desires that human beings always attempt to fulfill these same desires, even if it means overcoming certain conformity demands, and that conflict becomes a function as a result of these innate human needs faced with unfriendly external conditions.

At the centre of the model is the recognition that human desire is both powerful and persistent. Philosophical, theological, and psychological traditions agree that human beings exhibit innate inclinations—self-preservation, ambition, competition, and emotional impulses—that can generate tension when they clash with social expectations. These desires, while not inherently negative, may become destructive when amplified by frustration, unmet needs, or perceived injustices. Such inward impulses create what the model identifies as internal conflict pressure, a foundational force shaping human behaviour.

External conditions serve as the second major component of the model. These include structural inequalities, scarcity of resources, weak institutions, social pressure, discrimination, environmental insecurity, and competing interests. Such conditions, described as external conflict triggers, interact with internal desires to either escalate or moderate conflict potential. When external factors are hostile or unfavourable, they stimulate internal desires in ways that push individuals or groups toward confrontation, aggression, withdrawal, or resistance. Conflict arises when the inner drive to fulfil desires meets external obstacles that frustrate or oppose these desires. This interaction produces tension, which, if not properly managed, manifests as interpersonal disputes, social unrest, institutional breakdown, or violent confrontation.

The model therefore offers a more holistic understanding by bridging psychological and structural perspectives built on Johan Galtung's Structural Conflict Theory, published in 1969. According to Galtung (1969), conflict is the result of structural violence, meaning systemic

arrangements that consistently create inequality, exclusion, and unequal life chances. In this formulation, violence is not confined to physical hurt but is incorporated into the political, economic, and social institutions that systematically favor some groups over others. Conflict, then, is not accidental but structurally induced when social systems fail to distribute power and resources equitably.

Despite its enduring relevance, Galtung's theory has its foundation in an external ontology of conflict. It privileges the structural determinants while treating human actors primarily as reactive agents responding to systemic constraints. The theory assumes, implicitly, that if unjust structures were to be torn down or reformed, then conflict would scale down proportionally. This assumption elides a basic dimension of social life: the very nature of human desire. In leaving desire outside its analytic core, structural theory underestimated the internal motivational powers that drive social action and maintain conflict well beyond material deprivation.

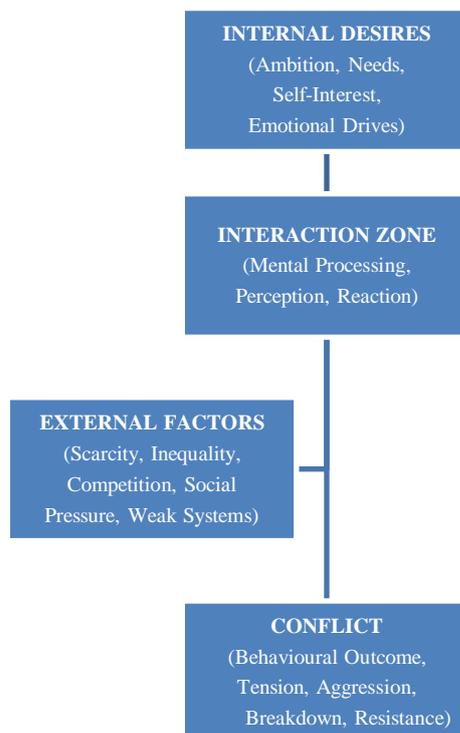
What the Inherent Conflict Model does for conflict theory is to introduce human desire as a constitutive and irreducible element of conflict. Drawing from philosophical and anthropological traditions that consider desire infinite rather than finite, the model claims that conflict is ontological rather than contingent. Human desire, but not only for power, recognition, status, identity, or security, is inherently insatiable and relational. It is not the scarcity of supply, but rather the comparative and expansive nature of desire itself that generates conflict. People and groups define their wants with respect to others in such a way that competition and rivalry remain perpetual aspects of social life.

In this view, social structures do not create conflict in themselves but serve as mediating environments through which desire is articulated, restricted, or heightened. Structures distribute opportunities, assert constraints, and establish hierarchies, thereby influencing the manners in which desire comes to expression. Conflict arises when the dynamic force of human desire encounters structural limits incapable of yielding to its growth. In this encounter, inequality and injustice do not constitute desire but amplify its hostile articulation. Consequently, structural violence and innate desire dialectically interrelate rather than independently function.

This theoretical synthesis reworks the role of structure in conflict analysis, from a view of structure as a primary causal agent to structure as an arena in which inherent human drives collide. Conflict will never disappear from structurally reformed or materially improved societies

because desire always outstrips institutional capacity. But similar structural conditions can lead to different conflict outcomes depending on how desires are socially regulated, symbolically recognized, or politically negotiated. Thus, the persistence of conflict and its contextual variation are explained. By locating conflict in the interaction of insatiable human desire and structural arrangements, Beska & Neji's Inherent Conflict Model challenges the normative assumption that conflict is an aberration to be eliminated. Instead, it is understood as a permanent condition of social existence. The theoretical implication is profound: peace cannot be conceptualized solely as the absence of structural injustice but must be reconceived as a process of managing, channeling, and institutionalizing desire. The model in this sense extends Galtung's structural theory into a more comprehensive ontology of conflict-than that which recognizes conflict not only as socially produced but inherently human.

Figure 1: Conflict Interactive Movement (CIM)ⁱ



Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives on Human Nature

Various biblical texts (Mark 7:21-23, Jeremiah 17:9-10 and Genesis 6:5-6) consistently portray human nature as degraded yet renewable. The cited passages emphasize the innate tendency

toward evil with specific references to the heart as the source of thought and action. These provide a foundation for the description of human conflict not simply as external or social in origin but as part of the human condition.

Contemporary scholarship has expanded on these scriptural perspectives. Tsegaw (2024) suggests that biblical descriptions of human sinfulness find empirical correlates in evolutionary psychology and social cognition. Green (2022) offers a cognitive-theological exegesis of original sin; he shows that humans are biologically and socially hardwired toward self-serving behaviors, a hardwiring requiring constant moral struggle. Wolfe (2024) underscores the point that renovation, or “new creation,” consists of both a spiritual and psychological process, in which these instincts can be restrained.

Modern psychology reinforces this perspective. Studies show that the “dark side” of human personality traits like narcissism, Machiavellianism, and even certain forms of conscientiousness can compel harmful behaviors if allowed to run unchecked (Current Psychology, 2023). Freud's 1923/1961 model of the id, ego, and superego again complements this idea, in that the tension between instinctual drives and social restraints results in constant internal conflict. Together, these biblical and modern perspectives give an indication that conflict is the result of a combination of innate human tendencies with external conditions that demand conscious moral and spiritual constraint.

The Nature of Human Desire

Human desire is insatiable and multivariate in nature, ranging from material to psychological. Maslow (1943) hierarchy of needs illustrates that, beyond basic physiological and safety needs, humans have needs related to belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The frustration of desires at any level leads to aggressiveness and interpersonal conflict.

Theologically, it is implicated in sin. According to Augustine (1998), the human will is “restless,” naturally drawn toward self-interest and away from God. Scripturally, untamed desire has been condemned as the root of both individual and social evil (1 John 2:16). On a contemporary note, recent research confirms that unregulated desires can be actualized in self-serving behaviors with consequences for social impact (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2023).

Desire is not, in itself, vicious; it is only bad when it overflows the banks of the law or society's requirements. Kant (1997) differentiated between rational wishes oriented to moral law and wishes controlled by self-interest, pointing out that the latter facilitates conflict. Freud (1961), in turn, noted that instinctive drives must be curtailed lest they cause destruction, stressing thus the importance of reflection, discipline, and moral governance.

Inevitable Nature of Conflict

The Inherent Conflict Model describes a cyclical process of human motivation, moral tension, and renewal. It proposes that human desire—both material and spiritual—functions as the primary catalyst for human action, inevitably producing conflict when unrestrained or misdirected. The model integrates biblical theology, psychological theory, and philosophical reflection to illustrate that conflict is not an anomaly of human existence, but rather an inherent and recurring phenomenon.

Figure 2: Cycle of Human Desiresⁱⁱ



Desire Awakens

At the root of the human condition is the endless array of desires, beginning with the simplest desires of the human body and ending with spiritual longings. In the biblical story, Genesis 6:5 is seen saying, "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time,"

suggesting a powerful and ubiquitous desire. Maslow identified the hierarchical structure of human needs as the foundation of human motivation, beginning with basic needs of survival and ending in self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Current Psychology, (2023) extend this view by showing that human desire is neurologically reinforced through the brain's reward system, making it both biologically inbuilt and socially formed.

In real-life situation, the rise of consumer culture triggers desire for identity and self-worth, once anchored in communal belonging now manifests through consumption—new gadgets, fashion, or experiences. Advertising industries exploit this awakening of desire by linking products to self-image, reinforcing what theologians might call covetousness (Exodus 20:17) and psychologists term symbolic self-completion.

Desire-Pursuit

After desire emerges, people look for fulfillment from their actions. These actions can remain altruistic, like when they engage in volunteering or caregiving activities, or selfish and result in immoral actions. According to Tsegaw (2024), both social contexts and cognitive inclinations affect how individuals choose to act on their desires. This corresponds to Aristotelian ethics, which state that the role of virtue is to modulate desire. Desire that is in concert with reason and the common good promotes harmony, and when it becomes selfish, it causes disorder.

In a real-life illustration, a corporate executive may initially desire financial stability for their family (a legitimate need). However, unchecked ambition may transform that desire into greed, leading to unethical decisions such as embezzlement or exploitation. Thus, the satisfaction of desire, without moral reflection, becomes a seedbed for corruption.

Conflict and Oppression

Conflict arises when the pursuit of individual or group desires surpasses available resources, moral boundaries, or mutual respect. James 4:1-2 captures this succinctly: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?” The modern psychology corroborates this: even minor personality differences, when coupled with competitive or scarcity-driven contexts, can escalate into systemic conflict (Current Psychology, 2023). This phenomenon extends beyond individuals to societal structures—where collective

desires (e.g., for power, status, or national dominance) create systems of oppression and inequality.

Putting it in real life, an environmental crisis exemplifies this stage. The human desire for progress and comfort has led to overconsumption of natural resources, producing ecological imbalance. Nations and corporations, pursuing profit and growth, often exploit both environment and labor, demonstrating how collective desire can yield global-scale conflict.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection constitutes the moral and psychological turning point of the cycle. Augustine (1998) emphasized that self-awareness of sin—one’s inherent inclination toward disordered desire—is the foundation of repentance and renewal. Modern cognitive-behavioral studies support this, showing that reflective individuals, trained in moral reasoning, demonstrate reduced impulsivity and greater empathy (Wolfe, 2024).

This stage requires humility, introspection, and confrontation with one’s motives. Theologically, it represents conviction; psychologically, it represents cognitive restructuring; philosophically, it mirrors Socrates’ dictum that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” For instance, a manager who perpetuates a toxic work culture might only recognize their role in the problem after employee burnout or resignation. Through reflection—perhaps facilitated by therapy, mentorship, or faith practice—they acknowledge their flawed assumptions about control and productivity.

Goal Resetting

Following self-reflection comes compromise—the deliberate reorientation of desires toward moral, ethical, or spiritual ideals that should reduce the risk of conflict. Ezekiel 36:26 expresses this transformation: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.” In contemporary psychological discourse, renewal parallels cognitive reframing or values realignment (Wolfe, 2024).

Through renewed consciousness, individuals and societies can redirect ambition into stewardship, competition into collaboration, and consumption into sustainability. Renewal does not eliminate desire but refines it. Former addicts who undergo recovery programs embody this

stage vividly. They replace destructive cravings with purposeful activities—mentorship, creativity, or spirituality. Their desires persist but are transfigured into life-affirming pursuits.

Desire Reemerges

Even after renewal, desire resurfaces—signifying the cyclical, rather than linear, nature of human motivation. Philosophically, this mirrors Heraclitus’ concept of perpetual flux and Augustine’s notion of restless heart—that human longing never fully ceases until it is grounded in the divine. In social life, renewed desires might manifest positively at first but can again distort over time if unchecked. This reemergence maintains the dynamism of human existence, propelling growth while perpetuating moral tension.

Social reform movements often begin with pure motives—justice, equality—but may later devolve into new forms of exclusion or dominance once power is attained. This demonstrates the perpetual recurrence of desire and the fragility of moral equilibrium.

The Inherent Conflict Model illustrates that human existence is not a steady progression toward peace, but a rhythmic oscillation between desire, conflict, and renewal. Each stage interacts with the next, forming a continuous loop that reflects the essence of moral anthropology: humanity’s simultaneous capacity for virtue and vice. Biblically, it underscores the need for divine grace; psychologically, it emphasizes self-awareness and regulation; philosophically, it reaffirms that conflict is intrinsic to the human condition—not to be eradicated, but to be understood and transformed.

Philosophical Perspectives on Human Conflict

It is complemented by biblical and contemporary insights into the heart. Augustine (1998) argues that sin begins in the heart; moral failure is an inner rather than purely social affair. Hobbes (2017) says humans are naturally competitive and aggressive, requiring social arrangements for stability to be maintained. Kant (1997) emphasizes rational moral agency as the means by which humans transcend self-interest. Freud (1961) added a psychological perspective, highlighting how instinctual drives and the imperatives of society create an inner tension that often expresses itself as social conflict.

Taking all these perspectives into view consolidates the Inherent Conflict Model, emphasizing that conflict is born out of inherent propensities fueled by social and psychological dynamics.

Classical philosophy, therefore, imbues depth to explanations, while Scripture and contemporary research elucidate both the genesis and mitigation of conflict.

The Need for Self-Assessment and Restoration

Ethical and spiritual renewal is central to mitigating inherent conflict. Self-assessment enables him to identify misaligned desires of his before they cause harm. Biblical exhortation Psalm 139:23-24; Ezekiel 36:26 urge constant self-examination and transformation. Contemporary research confirms that reflective practice and moral reasoning enhance ethical behavior and social outcomes (Wolfe, 2024).

Renewal is both internal and relational. Internal renewal aligns desires with moral principles; relational renewal restores trust and cooperation. Theologically, renewal is enabled through divine guidance, while psychologically reflective awareness and deliberate practice cultivate restraint. Together, these dimensions form the corrective mechanism of the Inherent Conflict Model.

Implication for Individuals and Society

The Inherent Conflict Model proposes that conflict springs from the discontent generated by the tension between internal human desire and external structure. Although opportunity is structured, but conflict occurs in the individual mind, where there is a clash between desire and structure. Because human desire has the tendency to expand itself, individuals cannot get rid of this desire but can only control and redirect it. In fact, conflict can only be successfully managed at this level in terms of how individuals respond to their own desires.

The first practical approach is that of reflexive recognition, or the ability to recognize desire not as an ever-changing force but as an entitlement. People usually experience dissatisfaction based on the notion of desires that always exist and require fulfillment. The approach encourages one to understand that desire usually stretches based on comparisons, expectations, and injustice. For instance, a young professional wants a quick boost in their career but finds themselves in a hierarchical setting where promotion takes a long time. Without reflexivity, there would be complaints and clashes with superiors. Reflexivity would enable an understanding of wanting recognition and status that may not necessarily include promotion but may focus on skill development or mobility.

Secondly, conflict becomes more inherent in the presence of desire related to survival or dignity. People manage conflicts by creating boundaries between what matters and what is desired. This process reduces the emotional investment in undesired outcomes. A student who does not get admission into their preferred university can find defeat in existence. The person can deflect their need for excellence by recognizing it as an aspired goal instead, therefore avoiding conflict with themselves and devoting their time and efforts elsewhere, without recognizing the system as unjust.

Thirdly, as desire can never be eliminated, people must refocus it into possible and viable channels. Refocusing desire helps convert conflict from Confrontation into Adaptation. A person wanting power politically but being denied access by elite networks can channel longing into organization and activism rather than resorting to negative struggle against authority. This approach relates to the desire to create alternative structures instead of positioning the desire against impossible obstacles.

Fourthly, often, the source of many conflicts stems from the issue of impatience, rather than impossibility. People must use their temporal orientation, or perspective, to realize the satisfaction of a want is not necessary immediately. For example, an entrepreneur operating in the presence of regulatory controls may experience tension between himself and the authorities. The entrepreneur maintains his/her motivation by opting to accept the delay as structural in nature. Frustration leads to endurance through temporal control.

Fifthly, desire can multiply through comparison. People mitigate conflict by deliberately narrowing their comparative reference groups, which reduces rivalry. Someone measuring success only in terms of higher-status individuals may be constantly dissatisfied. Improving the criteria used for comparisons, such as measuring success based on personal growth or serving the community, can end conflict without changing the external circumstances.

Sixthly, acceptance does not mean passiveness. Acceptance involves recognizing that some limitations are impersonal and cannot be negotiated, in order for people to save their energies for productive activities. A problem may then arise for an athlete facing age-related eligibility requirements. Acceptance helps facilitate transition into a role as a coach or mentor rather than nursing a grudge against an institution.

Seventhly, in its highest level of development, people control the conflict within by practicing moral restraint in order to contain their desires in such a way that they are unable to damage themselves or anyone else. For example, a business leader controls the tendency to maximize profit and thus avoids the tendency to exploit. Otherwise, the business leader can end up conflicting with workers and society.

The Inherent Conflict Model conceptualizes conflict as an internal process of negotiation as opposed to an external struggle. It cannot be controlled or reduced, and neither can they control or reduce their desires. What they have control over is the interpretation, direction, and timing of their desires. It is through this process of individual reflexivity, differentiation, redirection, and control of desires that they achieve the conversion of inherent conflict into an agency-generating process as opposed to an alienating force.

Conclusion

The Inherent Conflict Model synthesizes biblical, modern, and philosophical insights into the origin, mechanisms, and mitigation of human conflict. Scripture locates the source of evil in the heart and defines desire as innately insatiable. Contemporary scholarship, from theology to psychology, reinforces the enduring presence of these tendencies, while classical philosophy provides explanatory depth on the ethical and social dimensions of conflict.

Conflict is inevitable, therefore, but controllable. The cycle of desire, pursuit, conflict, reflection, renewal, and reemergence dramatically depicts both the eternal problem of human nature and the potential for moral and spiritual discipline. The model allows both a descriptive framework through which a proper understanding of conflict can be achieved and a prescriptive guide to ethical living by emphasizing self-evaluation and renewal. Ultimately, understanding the underlying tension in human nature and dedicating oneself to continual moral and spiritual renewal enables individuals and societies to address the complexities of conflict with wisdom and integrity.

Note:

ⁱ **Figure 1** diagram above shows the interaction movement from internal to external. When the mental ability of a man fails him, their tendency triggers conflict even when there is no serious friction between the internal factors.

ⁱⁱ **Figure 2** diagram above shows the vicious circle of human desire. The white parameter shows the heart of a man where conceptions of all kind of good and bad ideas are processed, while blue circle shows the interactive movement.

References

- Augustine. (1998). *Confessions*: R. S. Pine-Coffin, Trans. London, UK: Penguin Classics. (Original work published 397)
- Current Psychology. (2023), *Exploring the dark side of conscientiousness: The relationship between conscientiousness and its potential derailers: perfectionism and narcissism*. Current Psychology, 42, 27744–27757. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03828-y>
- De Cruz, H., & De Smedt, J. (2023). *Schleiermacher and the transmission of sin: A biocultural evolutionary model*. *TheoLogica*, 7(2). <https://ojs.uclouvain.be/index.php/theologica/article/download/65763/63503>
- Epictetus. (1995). *The Enchiridion*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing. (Original work c. 108 CE)
- Freud, S. (1961). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. (Original work published 1923)
- Green, A. (2022). *The maturational naturalness of original sin*. *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology*, 6(1), 20–43. <https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v6i1.61273>
- Hobbes, T. (2017). *Leviathan*: Oxford University Press, UK. (Original work published 1651)
- Kant, I. (1997). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). *A theory of human motivation*: *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- Tsegaw, M. A. (2024). *Shaped in iniquity or knit together by God? An inquiry into the psalmist's understanding of humanity's sinful nature*: *Old Testament Essays*, 37(1), 1–16. <https://ote-journal.otwsa-otssa.org.za/index.php/journal/article/view/633/424>
- Wolfe, K. (2024). “New creation:” *Grace and experiences of a renewed nature*. *Religions*, 15(9), 1041. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091041>
- Scripture References (NIV): *Genesis 6:5-6 Jeremiah 17:9-10 Mark 7:21-23 Psalm 139:23-24 Ezekiel 36:26 1 John 2:16 James 4:1-2*