

Soaring to the Heights



Validate

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Soaring to the Heights – Validation

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Introduction to devotional series “Soaring to the Heights”.

I have been asked to develop a series of devotionals related to becoming involved in missions. The premise of this material is what we can learn by looking at what is involved in soaring in the heavens and applying that to God’s call to mission.

Why this idea? It is because no matter what actual form of transport we use, whether we walk, ride in a boat, car, or plane we need to key our eyes on God. In a sense to soar so that we can keep our focus on God and on the mission we have been called to participate in.

There are many ways to reach those people. We can walk or maybe ride a horse or donkey. We can ride in a cart or in a boat. These were the primary avenues of reaching people for so many years. More recently we can now ride in a vehicle and can fly. Options that have increased our ability to reach people. In all of these a critical factor has been a vision of going where God calls. And an ability to soar, to let God open our eyes and hearts to all that is possible when our focus is heavenward.

There will be five sets of devotionals in this series. Here is the list and the focus of each. The overall theme for them is taken from the process of entering air or space, which in many ways is not much different from entering a remote location on the planet.

Here is a description of each of the five sets of devotionals.

Soaring to the Heights: Motivate– In any endeavor a key element is motivation. What motivates our choice to become involved.

This series of devotionals is to provide time to focus on, think through, and review all that will be or has been part of the process to encourage a person to choose to heed God’s call to missions and its related ministries as an avenue of service in the kingdom of God.

The scriptures for this section are drawn from the Pentateuch and the Books of History

Soaring to the Heights: Mobilize – At some point is time to commit ourselves. It is time to take all we have learned and put it into action. It is a scary exciting moment. It is filled with all kinds of emotions, fears, worries, and hopes. It is like the moment when you are accepted into school. It is like the moment when you sign a contract for a job. It is like the moment when a bride and groom say “I DO.” It is about the moment when you say YES to the Lord’s call on your life.

This series of devotionals is for the purpose of reflecting on those decisions, whether taken in the past or being taken now. It is about reviewing the consequences of such a decision and the reality that, once the decision has been made, life will never be the same. It is about facing the fear and the joy of choosing.

The texts for this section are drawn from the books of Poetry

Soaring to the Heights: Function – The idea of soaring is about learning to live at a new level spiritually. In some ways it is similar to what a plane deals with when taking off. There are several factors that come into play and need to be dealt with. These have to do with weight, amount of fuel, and final destination. If we do not care for them properly then we will fail. As in all endeavors in life our actions involve choices and how they will affect our plans and our ability to function. When we handle all those choices correctly then we will be able to soar, able to carry out the work that we are given. These choices also affect how long it takes to arrive at our destination. We choose to go to school after secondary school. We choose an occupation. We choose a place to live and so on. The choice of marriage and kids - depending on the person. The choice of hobbies and activities. I can go on. All are part of how I function in the role God has given me.

This series of devotionals is for the purpose of allowing time to reflect on past choices, current decisions, and thinking about the impact of any other choices that may be necessary. Learning to make wise choices is critical as we move from one phase of life and enter into the next phase of life – or, in this context, as we move forward in the mission of God

The texts for this section are drawn from the Prophets

Soaring to the Heights: Validation – We all want to know that all we have done has a point and will bring about the desired results. It is when we begin to see the fruit of all that has been done and being able to accomplish the goals that have been set.

In life, all the choices have this focus, they are designed to bring us to the point of carrying out specific goals and accomplishing key responsibilities. In life it is finding employment or raising a family. In the church it is becoming engaged in the mission of God.

This series of devotionals is for the purpose of, as before, reflecting on what happens when you have found the place where God wants you to serve. It is about reflecting on what it means to use the lessons learned, the skills obtained, and the relationships developed in carrying out what God has called you to do.

The texts for this section are drawn from the New Testament

Soaring to the Heights: Mission – Consider this. Every rocket sent into space has a mission. Some are for communication. There are exploratory satellites. There are manned missions, like the space station and moon. There are military satellites. There are weather satellites. So many kinds and each designed to carry out a mission. There is also often a set time and location for the mission. Some satellites have a short-term purpose and limited

location. Some, like voyager, are sent off on long journeys with a vast purpose. Some study the earth, and others study the beyond.

It is the same in life. We all have a mission. We all have a time and place of service. The goal is that all of us, in carrying out our portion of the mission, can work together to accomplish a greater mission, the call of God to proclaim the good news to all tribes and nations.

This series of devotionals is for the purpose of reflecting on how you fit into that greater mission. It is about thinking through the value of what you do, no matter how small or unseen, in making the mission possible. We often don't realize how important everyone is to the work being done. In mission aviation, it is the same. We need each other. We need people who keep things functioning. We need people to communicate; we need people to explore. We need people to carry out specific work at specific times. We need people who commit to long arduous efforts and we need everyone in between.

The texts for this section are from references to the heavens found in all of scripture.

May God use this series of devotionals to encourage and inspire you as you play your part in carrying out the great commission. May God richly bless you as you spend time in meditation and reflection. May you sense, over and over, the truth that God has called and that when God calls, He provides all you need to do what He has called you to do in His service.

Deployment 1 Matthew 3:16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

How do you celebrate the new year? Are you up late and with a group of people? Do you make noise and maybe kiss someone? Hopefully, someone who wants to be kissed by you.

How do you celebrate most anything? Usually, there is something that indicates what the event is and why you are celebrating it. But how does one celebrate the day they begin serving in the kingdom of God?

God celebrated Jesus' moment by descending in the form of a dove, and the next verse says that God spoke and declared that he was pleased. It is a great moment, and then the unexpected. The wilderness. A terrible, lonely place of testing and struggle.

Now, if you are like me, you hope for the first part. You hope there will be some visible approval of your choice and plan. If not that, then the clear approval of those around us. We want their approval. We want them to celebrate with us and

Then we are expected to leave. We are expected to go. We are expected to serve. That usually means separation as we go wherever we are being sent. The celebration is over, and it is time to learn.

What was the wilderness all about? We think of the testing. Yes, the first days of any ministry will be days of testing. We think of isolation. Yes, there will be some form of isolation from family, friends, and others. But the point really is learning to depend on God.

Deployment 2 Matthew 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Like it or not, now that you are involved in what is called faith missions, you are going to become intimately involved in what this passage means. You probably had a job and got a regular income. That income depended on you performing certain tasks and fulfilling various responsibilities. Your salary was part of a contract with a business, and you were pretty certain that you would get paid and would be able to manage your finances.

Now you are the birds of the air. Yes, you have a salary, but now the salary is paid out based on the generosity of others. Others who believe in God's mission and that people must go to the ends of the earth. They commit to supporting you in going. They willingly give and pray for you.

The challenge is finding enough people willing to do so and so raise enough funds to meet your financial needs, as well as funds for the ministry, and funds for your children's education, and funds for any number of critical aspects of living in another country.

You will have limited ability to save for the future. You will have to maintain constant contact with those who are supporting you. You will have to do many things you did not have to do when working for an employer and a paycheck.

You will have to learn more about living by faith than you ever realized.

Does this sound harsh? If you are not willing to live by faith, then it is extremely harsh. If you are willing to live by faith, then you know that everything is in the hands of God.

Deployment 3 Matthew 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

As I review this passage, I am reminded of what God has expected of my family and me as we have gone where he sent us.

Think about this. Foxes have burrows, but where are those burrows? They could be anywhere. But mainly in a dry and somewhat secure place. That sounds pretty good. I like dry and secure.

Now think about the bird. Most birds build nests up in the branches of trees. Those nests are subject to the weather, the wind, the rain, the heat, and the cold, and are affected by daylight and night. That is a lot of unknowns. Why would anyone risk that? You could go out one day, and the wind could carry away your home. You could go in search of food and come back and find everything soaking wet. Harsh realities.

Missions' life is like that. You never know exactly where your house will be. You never know just how safe and secure it may be. You never know if from one term to the next if you will be in the same place. I know the truth of this, having lived and served in five different countries. In each of them, I had to learn how to live in the place where my home was.

Also, none of those houses belonged to us. So, when we left the field, we had to pack up everything and be ready to find another place to live and serve.

Jesus lived that kind of life. Maybe a little more extreme than what I have dealt with, but a life that was designed to go wherever there was a need to hear the gospel and make disciples. That is what we are called to do. To call wherever we are sent home and provide a place to share the truth.

Deployment 4 Matthew 13:32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

What are your expectations? Are you hoping for grand results, incredible miracles, or are you hoping to plant seeds?

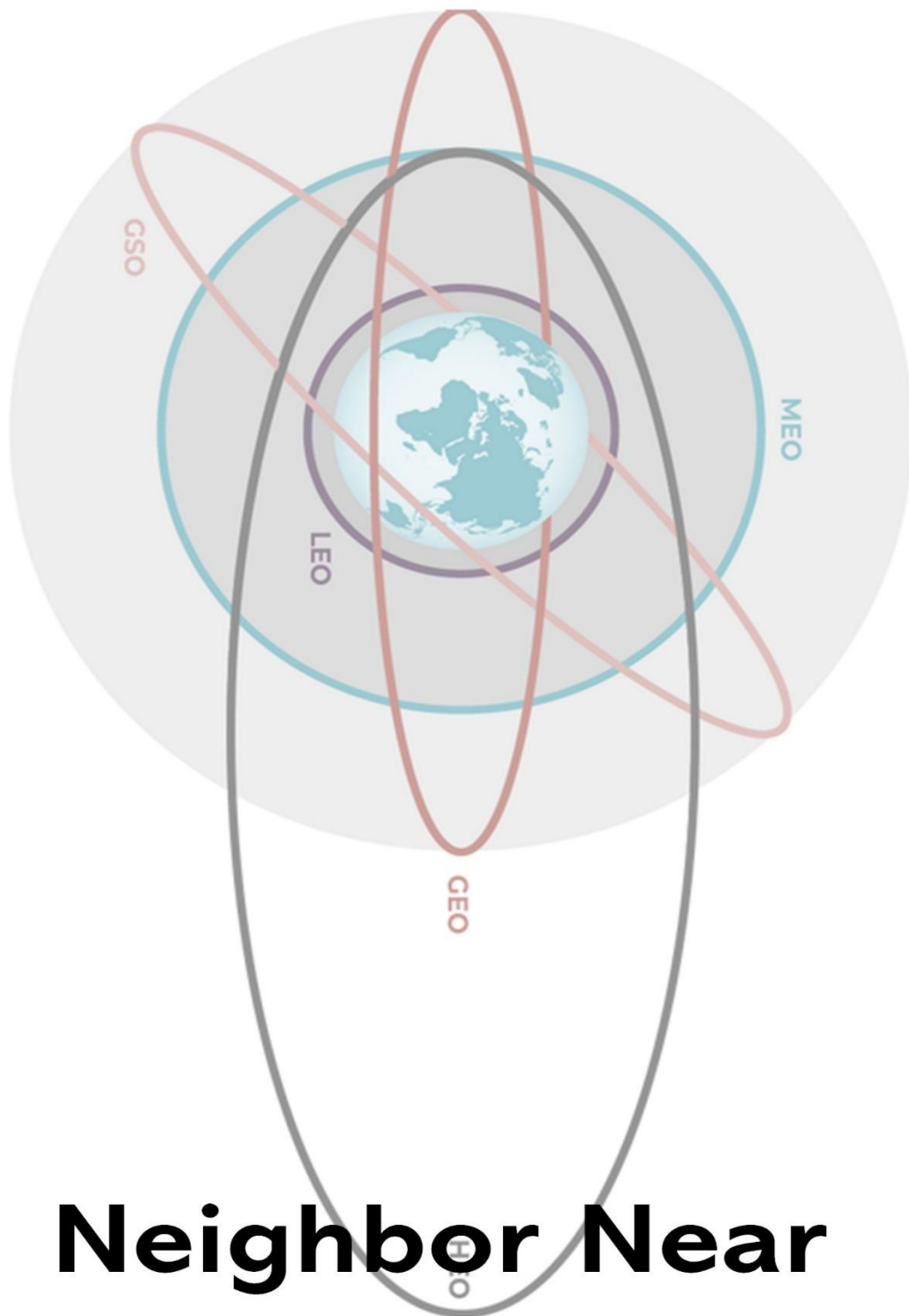
Consider the complexity of a plane, a jet, a satellite. All of them have thousands of parts, controls, and technical specs. In all of this complexity are the simple things that are critical to the function of each of these. The nuts and bolts that hold it all together. Without them, all of the incredible complexity that each represents would never get off the ground.

We are not called to do the incredible. We are not called to work miracles. We are not called to be extraordinary. All of these may happen, but they are not about who we are and what we are called to do.

We are called to plant seeds. Plant seeds of faith. In planting these seeds, we are not told what they will produce where they are planted. That is something unique about the seeds of the gospel. Unlike other seeds, where we know what will happen. An acorn produces an oak. A pumpkin seed, a pumpkin. You know how it works.

But the gospel is not like that. Well, it is. Planting the gospel will yield its fruit. What we don't know is how long it will take for the seed to germinate, how long to mature, how long to produce fruit, and how much it will produce.

At times, it will seem like forever for something to happen. At times, it will explode in growth. At all times, it will do what it is supposed to do. Produce that which will attract others who will come and provide a place to learn about God.



Neighbor Near

Deployment 5 Matthew 16:2-3 He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

One of the most difficult questions to answer is when. When will I have enough training? When will there be enough funds? When will everything be ready to go?

The crazy thing is, you may know or think you know the answers to who and where. The what is somewhat clear it is to go and proclaim the gospel and make disciples.

But until the when is decided, the who and where can change a lot. I thought I was ready to go, and then the door closed to both the who and where. It would be three years before the when became clear, and by then the who and where had shifted halfway around the world. Oh, and my part of the what had also changed, and I was asked to do a what that I had never considered.

For everyday life, we have all kinds of tools to help us know some of this. We come to depend on them to help us make many decisions. Decisions we think are right and give us some confidence in answering when.

The problem is that mission work is not about everyday life. It is about trusting the Lord and, in doing so, giving him the right to determine all of the above and change them if he so desires. I know a person who was called to the mission field at 22 and didn't make it there until she was 59. Then began 15 years of serving everywhere.

Don't worry about the when. God will take care of that. Just be sure you are doing the what where you are and with whoever is where you are. That is what when is.

Deployment 6 Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing

So just how big is the wingspan of God? Chickens have a pretty small wingspan, but they use it to protect themselves. They can't fly very well, but they can protect their chicks.

The biggest wingspan of a bird is 12 ft., that of an albatross. They can soar high above the earth mainly to seek out food. Not much help here in protecting anything. The biggest wingspan of a plane is 385 feet. Its function is to carry rockets high into the atmosphere to make it easier to launch. Again, no protection.

But none of these even compares to the wingspan of God, whose primary function is our protection. God can span all of human history and more, and all of humankind and more. There is no place in all of time and space where one cannot seek shelter under the wings of God.

The question that all will ask is if I am protected by God, then why do I still deal with danger, sickness, and whatever else threatens my life and world?

That has to do with how we understand protection. If we only think in physical terms, then we would never go anywhere. Once you leave your house, there is always danger. Truthfully, even in your house, there is danger. There is nothing that can protect us from the realities of a fallen world.

But if we are talking about the protection of our eternal soul, then God can take care of us. Remember Paul's comment in Romans that nothing can keep us from God's love. When it comes to my soul, I have the perfect shelter in God and can go anywhere he sends me in perfect safety.

Deployment 7 Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the distress of those days," the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

Why do we look to the heavens? Is it because we believe there is something greater than us, more elevated than us? Think about this, we create platforms to force people to look up. We create monuments that are tall and make us look up. We are impressed with tall buildings, and they make us look up. The mountains impress us, and we look up. The sun and moon are above us and force us to look up, as do the planets and the stars. By now, we should have a kink in our neck from all of the looking up.

We use this concept when talking about people. We look up to parents, teachers, leaders, and the famous. Why do we do this?

Well, the tall stuff just by its nature causes us to look up. We see the majesty, the glory, the impressiveness of it all. In the same way, we look up to people hoping they will be wonderful, worthy, and provide guidance that is visible, much like any of the above tall objects.

In looking at all of these, there is one thing that is high above all of them. God. Scripture is filled with the concept of lifting our eyes, our heads, our hands, our thoughts up. Not that God is visible, but that God is worthy of such a symbol of awe and respect.

All of the tall stuff is great, but none of it can truly provide the guidance we need. All the people who are wonderful can be helpful, but in the end, the one thing we need to fix our eyes on is our Lord. Only he can penetrate the darkness of the world and the obscurity our sin has caused and lead us.

Deployment 8 Matthew 26:34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

Have you ever just stopped and listened to the birds? It can be interesting. Some have beautiful songs, some just chirp, some squawk, and some cry in woefulness. All of their songs have meaning. The hungry chirp of chicks. The warning cry of a mother bird. The mating song of so many.

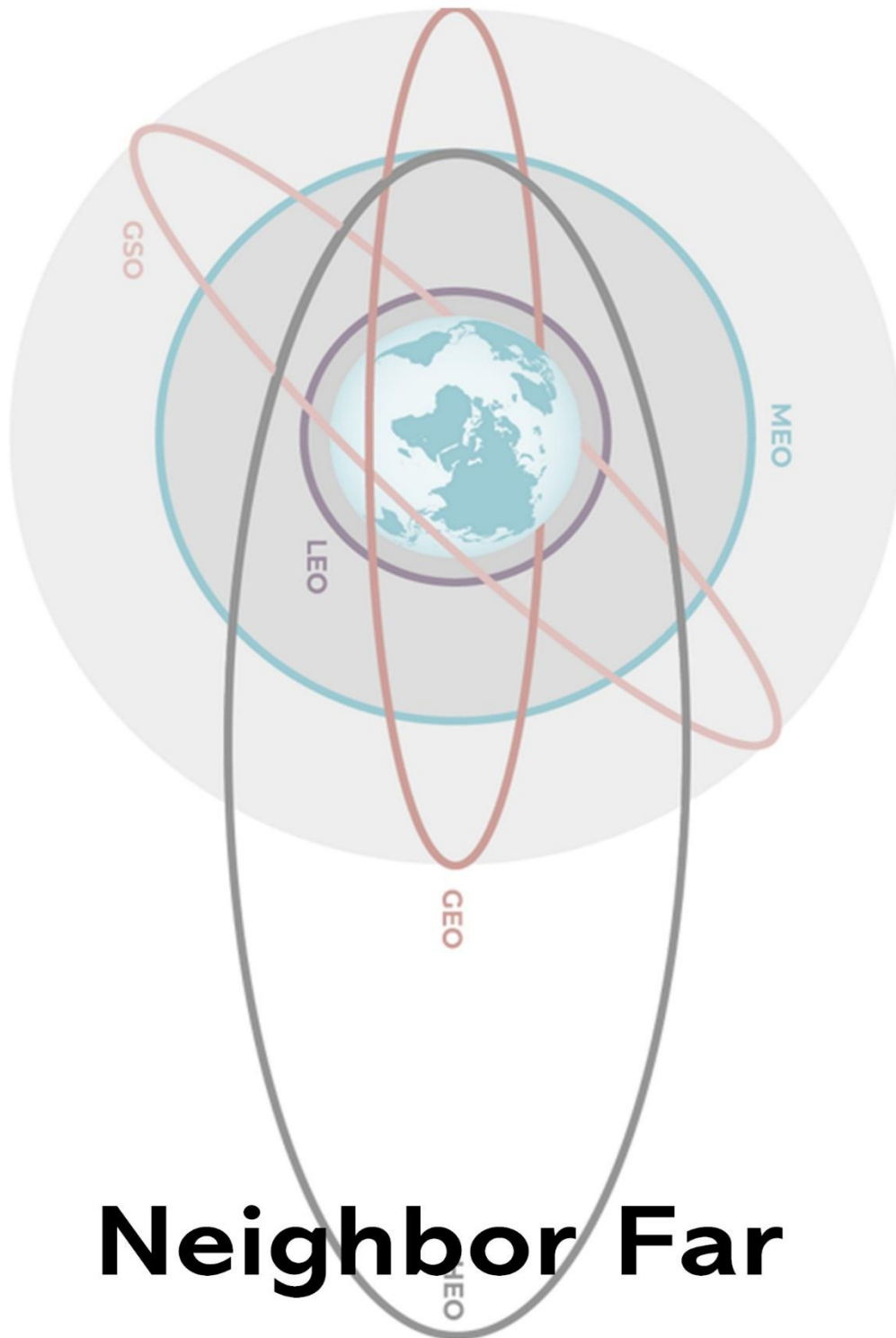
The chicken cries at the rising of the sun. At least that is the story. The concept is that it knows it is time to rise and get to work. That is the story we tell people. In this case, it crows. It crows to announce something else. A terrible reminder of a promise made and the utter failure in keeping it.

We all have our songs. We sing about our abilities. We sing about our sorrow. We sing about our friends, our jobs, and our activities. We sing when we are sad, we sing when we are glad.

Sometimes we sing too much, and people wish we would just shut up. Then we sing too little, and people become afraid of what we may be hiding.

About the only time when birds don't sing is when there is danger near. They go silent, and that silence is a type of singing. Sadly, we are not attentive and miss the messages all around us. The question to consider is what are you hearing? Are you hearing warnings about danger? Are you hearing warnings to help you avoid failure? Are you hearing the sounds of joy and approval? I could continue asking about what you hear.

More important is the task of learning to hear. Of learning to hear the still, quiet voice of God before it becomes a shout. Are you learning to hear all the music around you?



Deployment 9 Mark 1:10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

How many of us have seen videos of dams breaking, either real events or those caused by Hollywood?

The sequence of events is pretty clear. Two things bring a dam to the point of bursting. One is the slow breakdown of critical points within the dam. This means that it was designed properly to sustain the pressure being exerted against it. The other is that some cataclysmic event occurs, which suddenly weakens the dam. Something like an earthquake, and once again, the dam is unable to withstand the pressure being exerted.

In both scenarios, the next events are the same. There is a leak along seams and cracks. These increase until whole sections of the dam burst and there is an explosion of water. An immense torrent of water breaks out like an immense gusher.

There is the pent-up pressure of the water behind the dam. There is an increase in the impact of this pressure until it can no longer be held back. Then there is the cracking and finally the explosion.

Imagine all that is happening in creation on this day. For a millennium, there has been pressure. Heaven has been working to restore its presence in creation at a level that has not been seen since the garden. Decade after decade, the pressure is there. At Jesus' birth, the cracks appear. In the temple, we see further evidence that something is about to occur. It is only a matter of time, and heaven will break through, and a channel will be created. On this day, heaven breaks through, and hope is renewed, and God is pleased.

Deployment 10 Mark 13:25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

So, do you remember or have you heard of Chicken Little? The chicken that ran around crying, "The sky is falling". All because something fell and hit it on the head. Paranoia reigned supreme in the story, and in the end, the chicken gets eaten. Instead of seeing the real danger, the chicken gets caught up in paranoia over a false assumption.

So now that we have established that we are all too easily caught up in paranoia. We are in it again. Not too many years ago, it was Hitler, then the atomic bomb, then communism, and now it is global warming. Oh, some might add in there China and Islam. Each of which, in its time, represented some real threat, but nothing like what is portrayed here. In those, mankind could/did come together and deal with the threat.

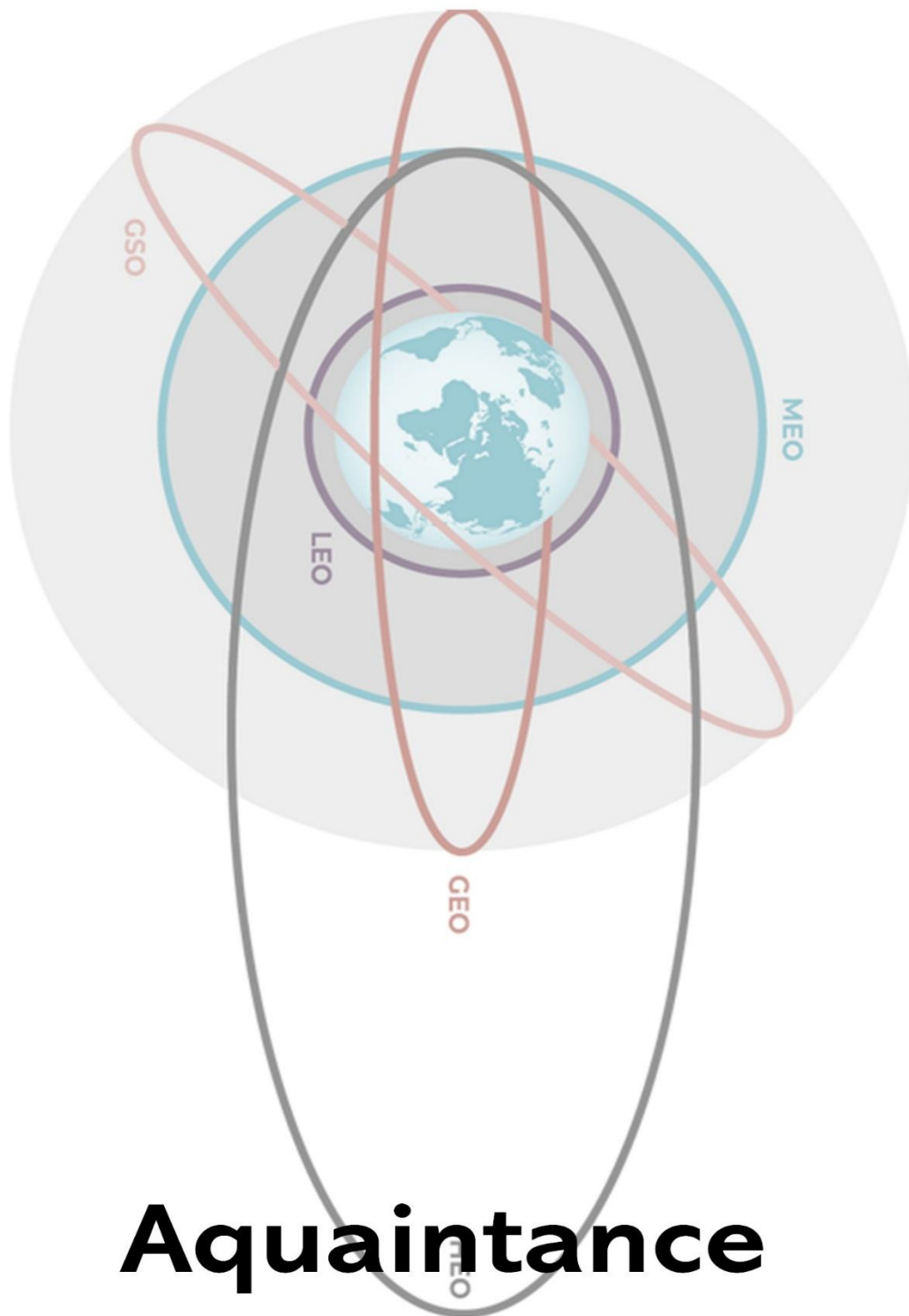
The threats remain, but not at this level. When the day comes for the skies to fall, it will be a day chosen by God, and mankind will have no options. There will be no capacity to negotiate,

ameliorate, or evade it. The sky will fall, or, as described in other passages, will simply roll up like a scroll.

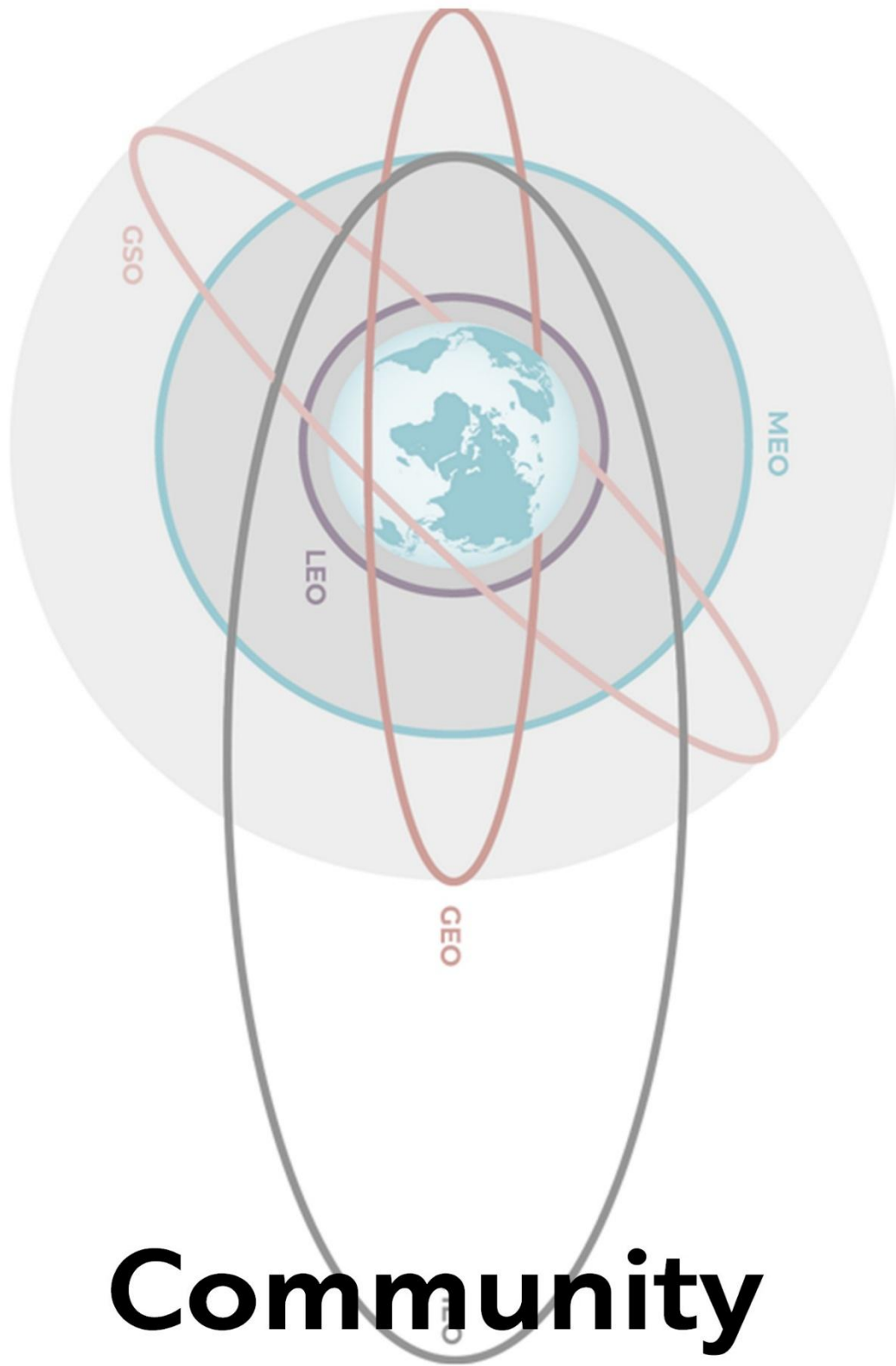
Now, what is the point of all this doomsday talk? If it is inevitable, then what can be done? Well, instead of running around aimlessly like the chicken, we can stop and consider what must be done to prepare for the inevitable judgment of God.

We can be busy about the work that God has given us so that others will put the paranoia behind them and find peace.

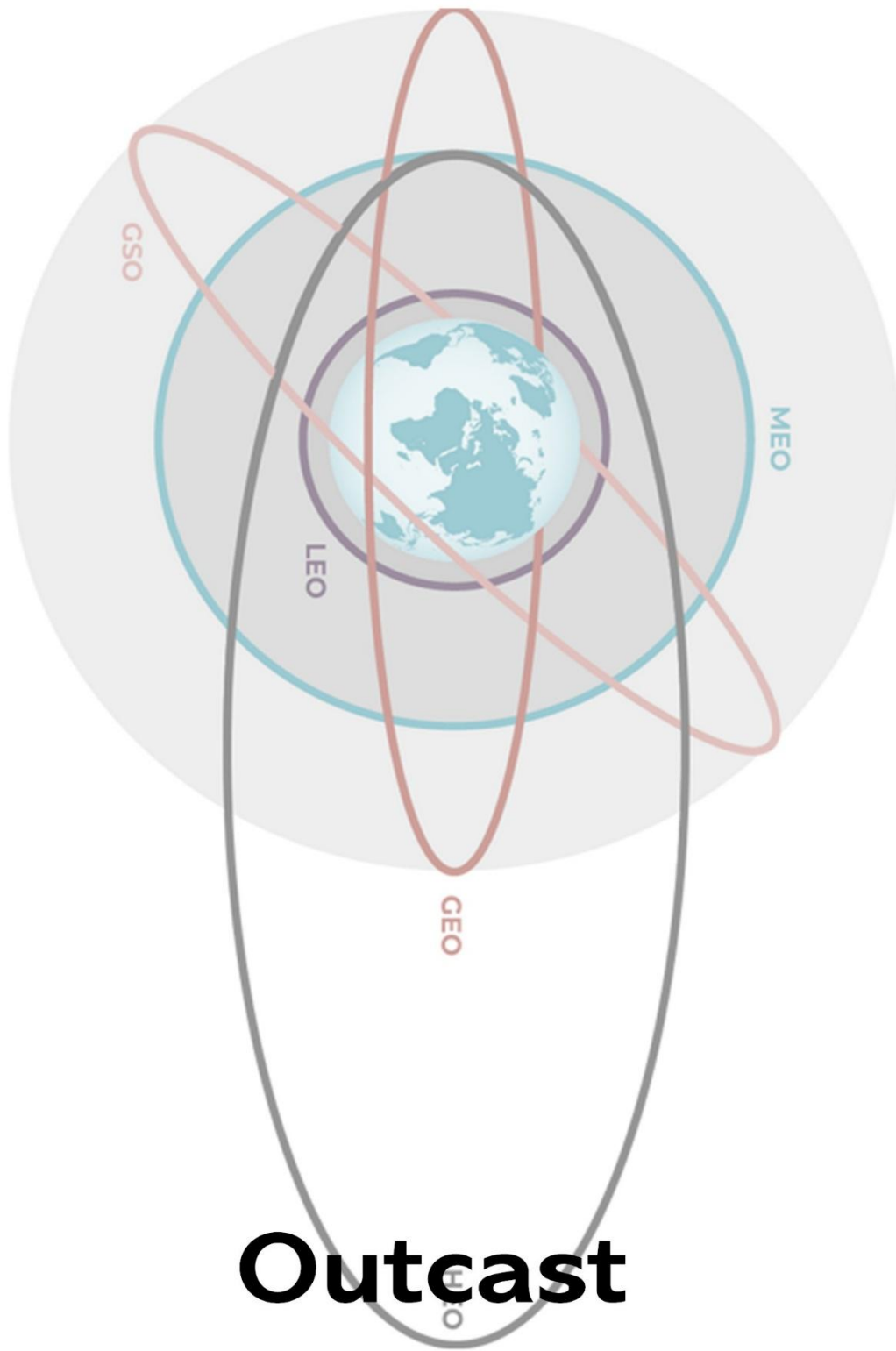
Actually, the sky is already falling. The plan for the end of the world as we know it is well advanced. Will we run around aimlessly or go about the task of helping others join us in calm anticipation of the return of our Lord?



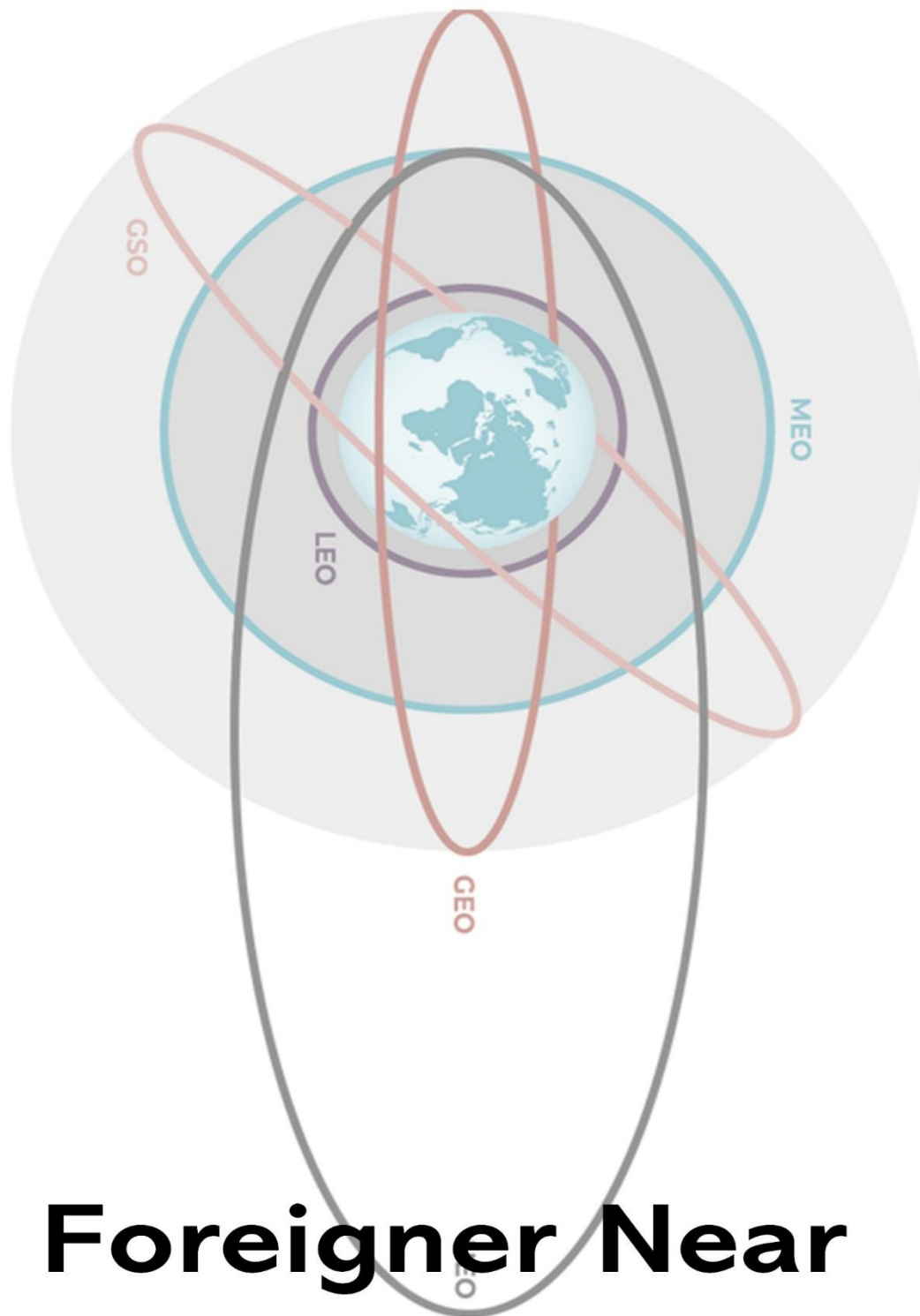
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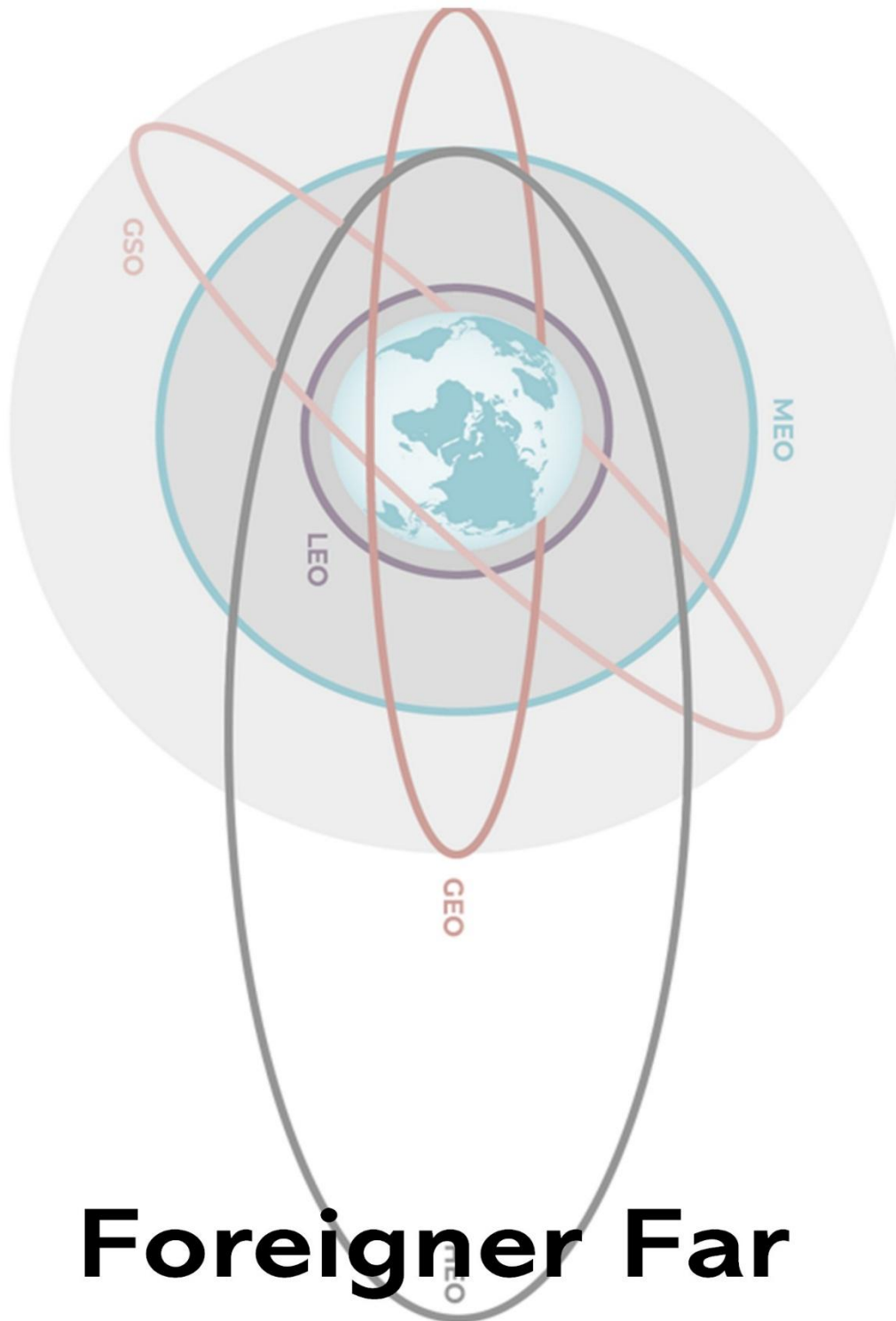
Community



Outcast



Foreigner Near



Foreigner Far
