

The Email I Never Sent

When the Message Was Never Sent but the Meaning Remained (The TINS Framework™): A Phenomenological Revisit

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Featured Phenomenological Lens

Intentionality (Edmund Husserl)

Intentionality refers to the idea that consciousness is always directed toward something. In this revisit, we explore how Jenny's attention was directed not merely toward an email, but toward recognition, understanding, explanation, and possible future outcomes.

Reflective Question

What was Jenny's consciousness directed toward before any action was taken?

This question invites us to look beyond the email itself and consider what was already occupying Jenny's attention before any action occurred.

Part of the author's ongoing doctoral research on phenomenology and human experience at the Institute for Christian Studies (Toronto).

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Category: Personal Life

As described in the original post titled "The Email I Never Sent," Jenny found herself staring at a completed email late at night. The message was written. The recipient's address was entered. The email was ready to be sent. Yet something caused her to pause. The issue was no longer merely the situation itself. The issue had become what the situation meant within her own experience.

At first glance, the situation appears simple. A person writes an email and then decides not to send it.

But did nothing happen?

From an external perspective, perhaps very little occurred.

No conversation took place.

No conflict unfolded.

No response was received.

No relationship visibly changed.

Yet internally, something significant was happening.

Jenny was reflecting.

Questioning.

Interpreting.

Reconsidering.

The unsent email became a space within which meaning continued to develop.

TINS Social Constructivism reminds us that people do not simply respond to events. People respond to the meanings they attach to events through perception and interpretation. What remained active for Jenny was not merely the situation that had occurred several days earlier. What remained active was the meaning she had attached to that situation.

As Jenny reflected on the email, something unexpected became visible. What initially appeared to be a message about another person gradually revealed something about herself. Beneath the facts of the situation existed disappointment, frustration, expectations, hopes, and a desire to be understood. The meaning of the situation extended beyond the event itself.

TINS Communication Accommodation Theory helps explain why communication begins shaping experience long before words are actually spoken or sent. Communication is not merely an external exchange between people. Human beings often engage in internal conversations long before engaging

in external ones. The words we prepare to speak frequently reveal how we have already interpreted a situation.

A turning point occurred when Jenny paused rather than immediately acting. The pause created space for reflection. What had initially felt urgent began to appear differently. The words remained the same. The facts remained the same. The situation remained the same. Yet Jenny's experience of the situation began to change.

TINS Transformative Mediation Theory highlights the importance of recognition. Often people think of recognition as something that occurs between individuals. Yet recognition can also occur within oneself. Sometimes a person begins to recognize motives, assumptions, emotions, expectations, or interpretations that were previously hidden from awareness.

The responses people choose then influence what happens next. TINS Instrumentalism reminds us that actions have consequences. Yet choosing not to act is also a choice. The decision to wait, reflect, and reconsider may influence future outcomes just as powerfully as immediate action.

The TINS Framework™ encourages people to pause before reacting, consider how situations are perceived and interpreted, pay attention to the meanings emerging within experience, and make intentional choices in response. In doing so, everyday situations become opportunities to understand more clearly how perception, interpretation, communication, reflection, and decision-making interact within ordinary life.

Why TINS Framework™ Theoretical Perspectives Matter:

A Deeper Phenomenological Lens

Phenomenology provides a deeper lens through which we can understand why the theoretical perspectives of the TINS Framework™ matter in everyday human experience.

Human beings do not live only through actions.

Human beings also live through possibilities.

This observation may initially seem unusual.

Yet much of life is experienced through things that never fully occur.

A conversation that never takes place.

A question that is never asked.

An invitation that is never extended.

An opportunity that is never pursued.

An email that is never sent.

From the outside, these events appear insignificant because nothing visible happened.

From the inside, however, the experience may be profound.

What interests me is that Jenny's most important discovery did not emerge after sending the email.

It emerged because the email was not sent.

Had Jenny immediately clicked "send," the opportunity for reflection may never have occurred.

The pause created a space in which interpretation became visible.

The pause revealed meaning.

The pause exposed assumptions.

The pause invited self-understanding.

Over the years, both as a pastor and mediator, I have observed that people often assume conflict begins when words are exchanged.

Yet conflict frequently begins much earlier.

Conflict often begins within perception and interpretation.

Before people speak, they interpret.

Before people respond, they assign meaning.

Before people act, they imagine consequences.

Long before communication occurs externally, communication is already occurring internally.

This is why some conversations become difficult before they even begin.

The conversation has already been rehearsed.

The responses have already been anticipated.

The intentions of others have already been interpreted.

The emotional atmosphere has already been formed.

The event has not happened.

Yet experience is already unfolding.

Perhaps this is one reason reflection matters.

Reflection allows people to examine the meanings they are carrying before those meanings become actions.

Reflection slows the movement from interpretation to reaction.

Reflection creates space for alternative possibilities.

What fascinates me is that meaning is rarely fixed.

Meaning can change even when no external event changes.

The next morning, Jenny opened the same email.

The words had not changed.

The facts had not changed.

The situation had not changed.

Yet the urgency had softened.

The experience had changed.

What changed?

Meaning changed.

This observation carries an important lesson for everyday life.

Many decisions are made too quickly because people assume their first interpretation is their final interpretation.

Yet human understanding often develops over time.

New perspectives emerge.

New questions appear.

New possibilities become visible.

The situation remains the same.

The meaning changes.

The next time you find yourself preparing an important communication, it may be worth asking a different question.

Not simply:

“What do I want to say?”

But:

“What has this situation come to mean to me?”

And perhaps even:

“Could that meaning change?”

Notes

1. The TINS Framework™ integrates six established theoretical perspectives. References such as “TINS Social Constructivism” or “TINS Instrumentalism” indicate the application of these theories within the TINS Framework™ and do not imply ownership of the original theories.
2. Readers interested in the biblical integration of the six theoretical perspectives within the TINS Framework™ may wish to consult my book *Biblical Mediation in Marriage and Family Conflict Resolution* (Revised Edition, 2025), published under my full name, Joshua Chee-Ning Lam.
3. Readers interested in exploring the six theoretical perspectives of the TINS Framework™ in everyday life may wish to consult the **Why You Matter five-book mini-series** published from January to May, 2026 on personal life, work, marriage, family, and community under the name Joshua C. Lam.