

2017 INSPIRE LEADERS CONFERENCE: Session III, “One Culture”

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What is culture, why does it matter to us, and how can we release a flourishing culture in our locations?

“And since WE HAVE THE SAME SPIRIT OF FAITH, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that GRACE, HAVING SPREAD THROUGH THE MANY, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:13-15 (NKJV)

Do you believe God wants a specific culture to rest on us across cities? Notice that the same grace rested on people across different cities because they were related. They shared a culture of faith and grace.

I love Maui. On a recent snorkel boat trip there, I asked the captain why he has chosen our spot for snorkeling, since we’d never been there before. His answer: This is where the fish are!

In this session, I want to put the issue of culture before us because culture is all about where the fish are, and what kind of bait we’re using. Are we where the fish are? Are we using good bait? The answer reveals our culture.

WHAT IS CULTURE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- **Culture is first a NATURAL thing.** In the anthropology and in the business world culture refers to the system of beliefs that guide a the behaviors of a community or an organization. People groups (and enterprises) have cultures. Those cultures distinguish them as unique, and often drive their success or failure as a group.
- **Church culture is the ATMOSPHERE of a church.** Is the way things are done. Your programs, traditions, practices and vocabulary. Culture is what you doing why you do it. Culture is the way we do things around here - it’s our vibe, our tone, the impression we leave. It’s how we roll as a church.
- **Culture and atmosphere can be SUPERNATURAL.** As I’ve travelled the world in ministry, I’ve experienced atmospheres of freedom, health and love - and also atmospheres of supernatural oppression and darkness. The early church lived out a supernatural culture of love and unity. The upper room had supernatural culture.

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch... And the hand of the Lord was with them, and A GREAT NUMBER BELIEVED AND TURNED TO THE LORD. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had SEEN THE GRACE OF GOD, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And A GREAT MANY PEOPLE WERE ADDED TO THE LORD.” Acts 11:19-24 (NKJV)

Notice that “the hand of the Lord was on them” and they could “see the grace of God on them.” That is supernatural culture and atmosphere! Did this make a difference? Twice it says great numbers came to Jesus. You better believe culture is powerful and we’re gonna let God work on it in us!

When we get culture and atmosphere right, many people will come to the Lord.

THE TWO GREATEST POWERS OF CULTURE AND ATMOSPHERE

1. Culture can repel.

Have you ever heard of Culture Shock? The disorienting feeling of suddenly being subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life or set of values. I almost lost it at the San Fernando Post Office...

I love my church and heritage, but when I returned from the mission field in 1989, I realized our church has some culture issues. The greatest people, character and message, but weren't connecting well with Silicon Valley people and sensibility.

- Our building was shabby and outdated, so we renovated.
- Our worship was old school, so we got rid of the organs and choir robes - gasp!
- We changed our name eventually to something more clear and welcoming that identified with the city.

These were some "cringe factors" —not sins, just issues that limit us. There are other cringes we want to avoid so we don't unintentionally repel the very people we are hoping to influence for Jesus!

SACRED COWS make tasty burgers. Removing them can be painful, for sure. But if we know WHY we can do it. Some sacred cows we killed: long services, crazy people having access to microphones. We even took thrones off the stage!

Our problem is we are utterly resistible when we God wants to make us irresistible.

2. Culture can attract.

Have you ever been somewhere that you were just honored and proud to be, and you couldn't wait to get back there? Starbucks and Nordstrom's have worked on culture to get us to return. Contrast that with Kmart, where people say — why did I come here? Culture is powerful! It can either attract or repel.

We want to really connect with those who we encounter. Let's take our message, love, Presence and vision to it's best expression!

A FLOURISHING GATEWAY CULTURE

Our task is to create a flourishing culture...A culture filled with vibrancy, health, order, life, God's power, clarity. How can we create a great culture in our campuses?

We have to deal with our "culture killers" and energize our "culture builders."

Consider these five culture balances, and get ready to discuss!

1. GOSPEL-CENTERED VS. "DEEP."

We want our atmosphere to be about Jesus and His work in reconciling a lost world to the Father. Keep the main thing the main thing. Let's not be a church that makes "a thing" (the prophetic, deliverance, worship, etc.) THE thing. Every message, service, gathering centers on the cross.

2. INCLUSIVE VS. EXCLUSIVE.

We are not elite. We are about all people. Be about relationships and love. Inclusivity, grace, encouragement, affection, support, people are important, no one is unimportant, everyone's gift matters, everyone can be real. Multicultural and Multigenerational - All cultures, all generations, all people!

When outsiders can easily become insiders, you have great culture.

What about holiness? Holiness culture has too often moved us away from where the fish are. We have been so "separated and holy" that we're away from the fish. Jesus never meant holiness to keep us from the lost.

3. HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY.

Cultures that are preoccupied with authority, titles, control, guilt, manipulation, demanding, phony "super-spirituality" and the like are not healthy. We will be about openness, authenticity, support, joy, humility, putting people ahead of programs, being kind and real, united and honoring of all people.

4. CURRENT VS. OUTDATED.

Is our culture a culture of the past or the present? Think about the Amish as an example. Precious, but not much impact. Why? When I lose relevance and touch with current culture, I lose influence. We cannot lose influence. We will not be fashionable, but being totally out of fashion is no advantage when seeking to communicate. What if you went to your doctor's office and all his decor, equipment, technology, fashion and haircut was from 1971? Would you feel safe taking his pills, letting him cut you open?

5. PROPHETIC VS. PATHETIC.

Holy Spirit - the most attractive thing here. Presence is our thing! Let's be smart about the HS, attractive, not weird. Let's build atmospheres that honor the Holy Spirit and host Presence.

IN CONCLUSION, HERE'S WHAT IS SEE...

In a world filled with toxic strife, betrayal, brokenness, our culture is a place to flourish. There is an atmosphere that energizes, supports, encourages all people - young, old, rich, poor to discover who they are, how to heal, what I can become. Our culture is healthy - my family is flourishing here. I can flourish in this house, and so can you.

**Let's sail the culture boat a little further on if we need to
and GET WHERE THE FISH ARE.**

I ask each of you to help me build a Holy Spirit, Gospel-centered, current, multicultural, intergenerational culture so that we can win all people to Christ before our time is up.

Will you do it? We can do it together!