



## WEEK 1: THE CULTURE THAT IS US

JEFF HOOVER - AUGUST 30, 2015 - EVANGEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

### - CULTURE: WHO ARE WE AND WHAT ARE WE LIKE?

#### • WHAT IS CULTURE?

Don't copy the **behavior** and **customs** of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by **changing the way you think**. Then you will learn to know **God's will** for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Rom 12:2 NLT-SE)

- **Culture:** The sum total of the knowledge, attitudes, and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a society. It is a pattern of responses discovered, developed, or invented during the group's history of handling problems which arise from interactions among its members, and between them and their environment. These responses are considered the correct way to perceive, feel, think, and act, and are passed on to the new members through immersion and teaching.
- "**Culture**" determines what is acceptable or unacceptable, important or unimportant, right or wrong, workable or unworkable. It encompasses all learned and shared, crystal clear or unspoken, assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, norms, and values, as well as attitudes, behavior, dress, and language.
- **THE CULTURE OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST** (sometimes referred to as "Cascadia") ~ We in the Pacific Northwest are known for having an independent, pioneering spirit that shapes the way we live life.
  - **Seattle...Casual** ~ "According to a recent census report, Seattle is both the most highly educated and most literate city in the United States. Some might say that Seattle's dreary weather keeps everyone indoors, a condition conducive to intellectual pursuits!" Seattleites themselves are casual, tech-savvy, politically-minded, and practical. They love variety and new things, and will eagerly line up for a new X-box or an unknown band. You won't see a lot of luxury vehicles on the road, even though Microsoft millionaires abound. Instead, Seattleites favor public transportation and AWD vehicles suited to the rainy climate and excursions to the mountains.
  - **Boise...Change** ~ One Boise resident said it this way, "We're all from some place else – most of us came from places that had crowds. We envisioned Boise as a frontier. God's unfinished construction project." Every year Boise ranks on a slew of top 10 lists. The city has been placed among the best U.S. downtowns, the best city to raise a family, the healthiest, best place to retire, best place to be a doctor, a good spot for yogis and asthmatics. One person said, "I think there is LOTS of room for improvement, but that is okay because changes are happening daily. If you're inclined to get civically involved here, you can. If you're an activist who wants to make a difference you can have a huge impact in Boise."
  - **Portland...Creativity** ~ Portland has been described as a "natural bag of non-joiners." One of the most prominent values of this local culture is creativity. The unofficial city slogan is, "Keep Portland Weird," which opens the door for almost anything. "If you ask someone from Portland what they do, they'll likely reply, 'I'm a gardener.' Or 'I make things.' Or 'I like to write little books.' Rarely will the Portlander initially reveal, unless firmly pressed, what they do for a living; that they're an accountant, a pediatrician, or an insurance advisor. This lack of admission is hardly an issue of shame, or concealment, or sloth but rather a confession of personal architecture; in effect how people here are made: how they have designed and constructed their lives."

## • THE CULTURE OF KELSO-LONGVIEW

**Warning:** This is going to sound somewhat negative, but remember, God is going to change the culture in our region. Here are some of the things He will change...

### - Resources:

- **Time**...Plenty of time, but too much of it wasted on unfruitful pursuits.
- **Money**...Many people are spending 110% of what they make, living paycheck-to-paycheck with little margin and little restraint.
- **Relationships**...Tend to be either safe or toxic, as opposed to relationships that foster personal growth. Family is important, but once there is a break, the effort put into healing and reconciliation is often "too little, too late."

### - Limitations:

- **History**...We still remember how it used to be and are forever trying to figure out how to return to the "good 'ol days."
- **Education**...School is directly linked to getting a better job and making more money, so unless pursuing an education has a direct financial reward, it's not worth the effort.
- **Apathy**...Nothing I do matters, so I'm not going to try. "It is what it is."
  - **Hope deferred makes the heart sick**, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life. (Prov 13:12 NLT-SE)

### - Attitudes:

- **People feel stuck**...The forecast calls for "grey." The five months of literal grey in the winter can seem inescapable. This gives people the sense that their lives will only get better when they move away from Longview/Kelso.
  - That is why **we never give up**. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! (2 Cor 4:16-17 NLT-SE)
- **Cynical**...The default answer to most every question is, "NO!" Most people give up on their pursuits when they meet resistance. In an atmosphere
- **Change**...For many people it is mostly about changing their circumstances, not their hearts. They tend to be overly cautious when it comes to change, fostering a "wait and see" attitude. I want change, but I am waiting for someone else to come along and initiate it.

### - It's not all bad:

- **Location**...We are blessed to be one-hour away water sports, hiking, skiing, and beautiful beaches. The beauty of the Lake Sacajawea park was a big reason Longview was chosen as one of America's "Prettiest Cities" by Forbes Magazine in 2012, calling it "one of the most beautiful parks in the country." You're also only an hour away from eclectic urban life of Portland, without having to deal with its traffic and problems.
- **Opportunity**...Because of the local apathy and cynicism, there is a huge void of strong leaders which translates into endless opportunities for emerging leaders with vision.

## • WHAT ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL CULTURE OF OUR REGION?

- Driven by **consumerism**...We look at churches mostly for what we can get out of them, not what we will bring into the mix. This fosters both competition and insecurity in the local church.
- Limited by **skepticism**...It's hard for us to trust other believers and other churches, so we tend to be judgmental and tend to get offended easily. We abhor confrontation. So, instead of going through things, we mostly go around them.
- Awakened by **experience**...It's not important to me unless it's actually something that's part of my life. In fact, we are always somewhat skeptical of those whose experience is different (especially deeper and more meaningful)

than ours. When we do have an breakthrough experience with God, we tend to limit the celebration to a small group of close friends.

## - HOW DOES GOD CHANGE A CITY?

### • "ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"

- **"Do not love this world...**nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. **These are not from the Father, but are from this world.** And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. (1 John 2:15–17 NLT-SE)
- **Teach us to pray...**Your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! **Pray like this:** Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. **May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.** Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. (Matt 6:8–13 NLT-SE)
  - **We can honor God because He honored us.** How? By giving us freedom; the freedom to choose to love Him! Corey Russell talks about the kind of relationship with us that God is looking for...
  - **"He is looking for voluntary lovers:** people who long to know Him more than anything else; people who will live lifestyles of prayer, fasting and meditation on the Word of God because they hunger to know a holy God; people who will seek the knowledge of God because they want to be transformed and invited into the deep things of God's heart."
  - **Honor is about freedom;** allowing people to be free to be themselves, who they were created to be. If you don't know how to **protect freedom**, to cultivate it in the culture you are part of, you will not know how to bring Heaven to earth and keep it here.

### • CHANGED PEOPLE, CHANGE PEOPLE!

- **Not just a changed person, but a new person...**We have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. **The old life is gone; a new life has begun!** (2 Cor 5:16–17 NLT-SE)
- **True change cannot and should not be hidden. Our lives should overlap...**You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, **let your good deeds shine out** for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matt 5:14–16 NLT-SE)
- **We need each other more than we are willing to admit...**"The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged...The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from his book ***Life Together***
  - Tend an orchard and you'll have fruit to eat. **Serve the Master's interests and you'll receive honor that's sweet.** (Pro 27:18 PAS)
- **The relationships of Heaven are held together with honor.** Another word we can use for this heavenly connectedness is **interdependence**. We can see the interdependence that marks the Trinity in many places in Scripture. As just one example, consider the story of Jesus' baptism from Matthew 3...
  - After his baptism, as **Jesus** came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the **Spirit** of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven [**The Father**] said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." (Matt 3:16–17 NLT-SE)
- What a beautiful picture of **synergy and partnership!** Jesus the Redeemer, about to start his earthly ministry, bathed in affirmation from the heavenly voice of his Father and empowered by the descending Holy Spirit.

## ● CHANGE THROUGH ADVERSITY

- Never limit God to only make changes in our lives through what we perceive to be a “blessing.” Anyone who has been a Christian for even a short period of time knows that some of the **most dramatic heart changes** seem to come in times of adversity.
- **As we anticipate difficult times coming...** “In the next twenty years, **convicted Christians will need to focus on developing strong religious communities**, not necessarily defined by geography but by committed relationships. The next generation will need to be far more conscious of the ways in which they differ from the society around them.” Zachary Gappa, in **The Christian Post**
- A newly self-conscious, convicted Christianity requires a daily examination of the assumptions of the culture around us. **There is much hope in this change.** This may produce a stronger, if smaller, Christian community. And throughout the Bible we see how powerfully God chooses to use small communities.

## ● CHANGE THROUGH HONOR

- The Bible says that we are to **honor** the following:
  - **Jesus**
  - **Kings** (1 Peter 2:17)
  - **Parents** (Exodus 20:12)
  - **Wives** (1 Peter 1:7)
  - **Widows** (1 Timothy 5:3)
  - **All People** (1 Peter 2:17)
- How to relate to unbelievers is an important topic in Peter’s letters. At one point he puts the case in very direct, simple terms: “Honor everyone” (1 Peter 2:17). **Honoring** here means **having an active regard for someone’s well-being**. Not that we are simply to give people what they ask for or tell them only what they want to hear. The apostle is not prescribing convictionless civility. But even when we speak directly about our convictions, he warns, we must do so in the proper spirit: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with **gentleness** and **reverence**” (1 Peter 3:15-16). **This is what civility is all about: honoring other people**—even people whose beliefs and actions we dislike—in a manner that is gentle and reverent. from **Uncommon Decency**, by Richard J. Mouw