



# Values create a culture

**TN142** Training Notes series: Leadership

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**The idea of 'church culture' has received plenty of attention of late. Churches have undertaken 'culture reviews'. But what is 'culture' in a church setting? What does it look like, and is it the same as your values?**

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It is not easy to distinguish the two ideas, and the answer may not be that important anyway. But for these notes I am going to keep it simple and see it like this.

Values are specific, constant features of the way you see your church's life. Elsewhere I suggest it can be helpful to see them at three levels\*:

- **non-negotiable foundations** (the key factors that provide the rock on which your church life is built – these could be credal, denominational or key issues);
- **community principles** (specific features that mark out how you approach being church and what you hold to be vitally important – single words, phrases or statements);
- **internal agreements** (relatively minor features of what you expect of each other such as services and meetings starting on time).

Culture then is a broader and less definable ambience that those values produce all together. You fix your values, you work to follow them, and that produces a culture. So to change a culture you define and work at your values and the new culture then emerges.

You cannot change a culture directly – you change what brings about that culture, first by agreeing to work to your values, and then by making a range of adjustments to what you do to follow those values.

But churches sometimes come up with 'nice' ideas as their values which they have no real intention of working to or which present little challenge. It costs something to work to a set of challenging values.

\*I have slightly amended the three names I give these levels for these Training Notes and will use these in future.

## Relationship lists

I am writing this in 2022. Twenty years ago I undertook a consultancy assignment for a church in Kent. While on the premises and pondering what the real issues were in what I was investigating, I saw two pictures hanging on a wall. One was a warm red with a whole range of words painted into the design which spoke of positive relationships. The other was a cold blue with another range of words painted into the design which spoke of bitter relationships.

At the time that gave me the clue as to how to approach my assignment. Recently I rediscovered my listing of those two sets of words and felt they would form a useful backdrop for these notes. So instead of writing further about values and culture, let me give the two lists and then ask some questions. I have put the relationship words used in alphabetical order in each case.

Here is the **red list** as I noted it down at the time:

Accepted	Growth	Loved	Thank you
Appreciated	Healing	Mercy	Thoughtfulness
Communication	Honesty	Openness	Time
Community	Honour	Ownership	Trust
Consistency	Hope	Participation	Understanding
Daughter	Humility	Patience	Unity
Encouraged	Investment	Peace	Valued
Encouragement	Involvement	Pleasure	Wanted
Family	Joy	Restoration	Wholeness
Forgiveness	Life	Sacrifice	Willingness
Freedom	Listening	Safety	Worth
Gentleness	Love	Security	

And here is the **blue list**:

Ambition	Distrust	Individualism	Secrecy
Anger	Domination	Insecurity	Silence
Anxiety	Envy	Intolerance	Status
Bitterness	Exclusion	Isolation	Stress
Brokenness	Failure	Jealousy	Striving
Busyness	Fear	Misunderstanding	Tears
Confusion	Fears	Pain	Tension
Disappointment	Gossip	Power	Tiredness
Dishonesty	Hurt	Projects	Uncommunicative
Disillusionment	Ignorance	Rejection	Unimportance
Disrespect	Indifference	Resentment	Used

These come from pieces of artwork so don't try to tidy up the lists (by adding what you feel is missing, questioning what is included or taking out anything that is not a noun!). Nor get caught up in wondering what some of the terms might mean. What matters is what they say to you – which may differ from what they say to someone else.

Note, however, how closely these lists mirror the acts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (which of course are much shorter) in Galatians 5:19-26. You might like to look those verses up and see what is on both lists and what is missing on one. Be aware though that the colour lists describe 'relationships', rather than 'acts' or 'fruit'.

## Questions and actions

So here now are some questions and suggested actions. Adapt them as necessary to fit yourself and your church. Other than the first four, these may work best in a group setting. There are photographs of the actual pictures on the website's synopsis page for TN142.

### Personal

In these you may want to consider your relationships generally or with specific people when applying any of the red or blue terms. If you are brave you could ask someone close to you whom you trust to be honest to tell you what they would put for you for Nos. 1-3. This might then lead to an interesting discussion if you did this for each other. But be sensitive to each other's emotions in this.

- 1 Which of the red relationships do you feel you most embody in your own life in your relationships with others?
- 2 And which two or three of the other red relationships do you feel you need to work at and pray for because they are not strong enough in your life?
- 3 Which of the blue relationships do you feel you are prone to show more than you feel comfortable with? What actions can you take to correct this?
- 4 Choose one term from the red list and one from the blue and ponder on them throughout today. Find Scripture passages which illustrate those terms and meditate on those.

### Your church's values

In these you may want to answer yourself alone, but it might be a useful exercise for a home group, a staff team or a governance body to work at together. You can then take appropriate action, or ensure that your church leaders tackle the issues raised.

- 5 Which of the red relationships describe accurately one or more of the stated values for your church (choose up to four out of all those listed)?
- 6 And which two or three of the other red relationships do you feel you would like to consider for inclusion, because you believe your church should own them but does not at present?
- 7 What actions would you need to take as a church for those you have listed in No. 6 above to become really true?
- 8 Which of the blue relationships do you feel are particular dangers in your church at present? (These may affect the whole church, or just one sector.)
- 9 What actions would you need to take to correct those terms you have listed in No. 8 above?
- 10 Each person in the group might now pick one term from the red list that has not been covered so far, and one from the blue list, and talk about why they have chosen these two in particular and what they say about Christian discipleship in the context of church membership.

## Your church's culture

Values are specific descriptions of how you go about being church. Your culture is the feel of your life together as of today which is based on these values.

- 11 Describe what your present church culture feels like. To do this you may need to cite particular actions or activities to illustrate what you are attempting to describe.
- 12 Describe what your church culture might feel like in practice if you followed the red relationships in Nos. 5 & 6 above and avoided those in No. 8 above. To do this you may need to cite particular actions or activities, noting what would be different in each.
- 13 Each person might then sum up this activity by expressing what the two lists in total have spoken to them and what they have learned by studying them.
- 14 The group then puts together an action list from everything that has been offered in Nos. 5 onwards.

## Postscript

As a postscript to this exercise you might like to check out Training Notes TN25, *The radical values that Jesus taught*, on this website. The values of the kingdom listed there, based on a reading of St Matthew's Gospel, are:

- 1 We are to give Jesus Christ absolute priority.
- 2 We are to seek the approval of God rather than other people.
- 3 We are to be vulnerable with each other.
- 4 We are to be clearly different in our behaviour.
- 5 We are to be radically different in our attitudes.

That is what I meant about the challenge of values (above). How might you describe the culture that would emerge from this set of radical values?

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN142. See also Article A52, *How to run a church vision day*, plus Training Notes TN25, *The radical values that Jesus taught*., and TN74, *Understanding values*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of running a vision day for your church.

Sincere thanks to Karen Bourne, who painted the pictures referred to, for permission to cite the red and blue lists in these notes. Her pictures are shown on the website's synopsis page for TN142.

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