



Whoop! What the Church Can Learn About Values and Organizational Culture from Texas A&M

Steve Lawson
Regent University

Can the church actually make a difference in a community at a time when many people have given up on religion, business and government? Christians often see the job of the church as “getting people saved” and “taking care of the flock.” What if we were intended for more than that? What if it was possible to actually create, influence and sustain culture rather than just adapt to it? This paper will explore the success behind one of the strongest cultures in Texas – Texas A&M University. For more than a century, the Texas “Aggies” have built an environment based on strong core values and unchanging traditions. They have a unique ability to quickly assimilate freshmen and produce young men and women with a radical commitment to the school and to each other that lasts a lifetime. This qualitative study, based on interviews with two leaders, offers recommendations on how the church might strengthen its own internal culture, as well as position itself to influence its community.

“Nothing ever changes at A&M. A&M will never change.”

For some reason my ears perked up. My wife and I were having dinner with friends and had been talking about our kids. My oldest daughter was a freshman at Texas A&M University. Our friends were both alumni with three sons currently enrolled. We had been talking about the various traditions on campus as well as the energy of the football and baseball games. During the conversation, our friend proudly spouts off, “A&M will never change!”

I think the reason this caught my attention is that it’s not necessarily true. A&M is known as a cutting edge university and is one of the best business, engineering, veterinary medicine and agriculture schools in the country. In fact, that year alone, more than eight thousand qualified applicants had been turned away. So, how is it that a woman in her 50s is proud that nothing ever changes, while at the same time, thousands of 18-year-old students are clamoring to get in? And once those students arrive, how is it that they so quickly become “Aggies”? Every pastor I know would love for that to be true of their church.

As a pastor, I not only wanted answers, but was also wondering if I could take what I had learned and apply it to the church. If I could get the older generations proud that nothing ever changes in the church, while getting the younger generations to compete for the best seats, I would really be on to something. My quest for answers would surprise and inspire me, as well as lead me to some unexpected conclusions.

This paper begins by examining A&M's success with culture creation, which generates strong allegiance quickly in new students and leads to the longevity of the "Aggie" identity in alumni. This information is gathered through two significant interviews; Porter Garner, president and CEO of the Texas A&M Association of Former Students and Dr. Michael Hitt, distinguished professor of management at Texas A&M University Mays Business School.

The interviews are then interpreted and analyzed in relation to organizational culture. The final section will apply this material to help the church discover, strengthen and sustain its own unique culture.

How Do They Do That?

In my opinion, there is no stronger institution in the area of organizational culture than Texas A&M University. Aggies are known for their fanatical school spirit, their pride in their identity as Aggies, their unwavering commitment to each other that lasts a lifetime, and their strong work ethic, as well as for honesty, integrity, service-oriented attitudes and much more. If I am going to get answers on strategies used to create, strengthen and sustain culture it will be from the Fighting Farmers.

My first interview was with Porter Garner, president and CEO of the Texas A&M Association of Former Students. Porter was unanimously elected the association's seventh president and CEO in January 2000. In March of 2011, Porter celebrated 30 years of service to the association, beginning with his role as field director, where he logged countless miles and hours in assisting A&M Clubs across the state, nation, and world. Years spent interacting with Aggies one on one across the Aggie Network while witnessing their devotion to Texas A&M and to other Aggies, shaped Porter's vision for the organization, compelling him to create a culture built on a foundation of service and teamwork. Under his leadership, the association has expanded its reach, raised the largest annual fund in the organization's history, and enhanced the look, feel, and capabilities of the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center.

Among other things, A&M is known for being the friendliest campus in Texas. They still train freshmen to say "Howdy" when they pass someone on the sidewalk or in the hall. And surprisingly enough, most of them do it. This is an important fact because...I got lost. No worries, I just pulled over and asked the nearest Aggie for directions to the alumni building and they politely pointed the way. After, of course, saying "Howdy."

The Alumni Center occupies an impressive building on the east side of the campus. After parking, I walked across a beautiful stone plaza past a 12-foot high bronze replica of the Aggie ring. I entered through what must have been 10-foot mahogany doors into a grand hall with floor to ceiling windows, the 18'x18' Huddleston Video Wall, and six interactive exhibits showcasing A&M's history, traditions, and core values of excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, and selfless service.

Don't misunderstand, for all the building's impressiveness, there wasn't an air of pretense. Aggies are known for being down to earth, and Porter Garner is no exception. Porter's background as an oil field salesman for Hughes Tool Company and 18 years visiting A&M alumni all over the world have developed in him the ability to converse easily with presidents, ranch hands, professors, and construction workers. After being escorted to his office by his assistant, offered a bottle of water or soft drink on the way, and basically made to feel like family, I met Porter Garner, who looked like he'd be just as comfortable on the back of a horse as in a boardroom.

Culture's Birthplace – Interview with Porter Garner

Porter earned a BBA in Marketing from Texas A&M in 1979, and served as president of the Student Aggie Club while in school. In 2006, he was selected as a Fish Camp Namesake in recognition of his many contributions to Texas A&M.¹ This guy's an Aggie through and through.

He introduced himself, shook my hand and we had a seat in a couple of chairs by a window overlooking the campus. After a few pleasantries, we launched into the discussion. I started off by asking him what he believes are the strongest contributions to the culture at A&M.

He thought for a minute and said, "Probably the strongest contributor to our culture is our history – how we began as a school."

I was hoping for something a little more practical. I didn't expect a history lesson. I wanted to know what I could do. But I played along.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, when A&M was founded in 1871, we were an all-male military school. This, of course brought with it a tremendous amount of discipline. Later, when we weren't exclusively military, we were still all male. Because the college was located out in the country, away from any big cities, we didn't attract many intellectuals. We attracted mostly farm boys who needed to learn a skill that they would take back to the family farm. In fact, we didn't have many graduates because the farm boys didn't need a degree, they just wanted to learn. And when they learned what they needed, they went back to work."

Porter continued, "We had more ex-Aggies than we had students. But those humble beginnings inspired culture that was open and friendly. It was service-oriented with an 'It's not about me but about you' attitude. In the beginning, we attracted conservative young men that respected each other or were taught to respect each other, or they left."

I began to catch on. After all, the culture is the personality of the organization. Those aspects of an organization give it a particular climate or "feel." It is that distinctive constellation of beliefs, values, work styles, and relationships which distinguish one organization from another.² What better place to begin to understand an organization's culture than an organization's history? But I wanted to know what they did to create culture.

"So, what is it that A&M did to create and preserve that culture? What part do all the traditions play?" I wanted him to talk about all the maroon shirts, football games, the elephant walk, class whoop, or at least the 12th man.

Those traditions are incredibly important,” Porter shared. “But they are there because of our culture. They didn’t create it; they support it. When we began, we had a strong military influence. We attracted hard working kids.” (Here we are with the history lesson again.....) “Because of that, we have a strong culture of service and respect. The Aggie code – ‘An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do’ – has been there from the foundation of the school. Every freshman is taught what it means to be an Aggie. At Fish Camp, they learn our core values of excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, and selfless service.³ They have the Aggie code and our core values drilled into them for the next four years because that’s what it means to be an Aggie. And they are told over and over that even though they will leave here one day, they are still Aggies and the Aggie code and Aggie values go with them.”

“So you’re saying that all the traditions are worthless without being tied to a core value?”

“Absolutely! Without those values that are anchored in our history, we’d be just another school with a bunch of cliché sayings and empty rituals. We might as well move the campus to Austin.”

As Porter revelled in his dig at The University of Texas, I began to cringe at how many times I had done the opposite. Too often, the church is filled with activity without meaning, and we wonder why it’s hard to get people involved. Sure, the leaders have good intentions, possibly holy ones, but if they don’t communicate the purpose behind it and show how it supports the core values of the church, it is doomed to mediocrity or failure. For organizations to succeed, they need ways to translate vision, values, and purpose into action.⁴ I have often failed on that one. I started with the action and assumed people would understand the link to vision, values and purpose.

At some point, while I was deep in my thoughts, Porter changed gears, “You know, if you want to talk about culture as it relates to strategy, I’d much rather talk about this organization (meaning the Alumni Association).”

“All right,” I said, as if that was my plan all along, “Tell me about the challenges you faced when you became president.”

I didn’t realize that I was about to be schooled in leadership.

“To begin with, I didn’t fully understand the position. When I was made president in 2000, I inherited a staff of 48; many of whom were previous peers or superiors. To them, I was a traitor.”

He had me hooked. “What do you mean?”

“Well, I started by telling them I didn’t want the job” —a new Aggie interview technique—“and I presented them with a document explaining that if we were going to support the university and the new ‘Vision 2020,’⁵ then we needed to make some significant changes. Either they didn’t believe me, they didn’t even read the document or they just didn’t think I would follow through.”

I had only just met the guy and I knew better than that. Porter Garner didn’t seem to be the type to make empty promises.

“Then, when I began to initiate the changes, I faced significant opposition. I thought I was trusted, but found out otherwise. I kept running into a ‘We’ve always done it that way’ attitude.” (Those guys probably all go to church.) “And I was unprepared for all the complaints that went on behind my back.”

Knowing his current success, I asked, “So what did you do?”

“I went to see people. If I heard that someone was upset, I went to their office. I didn’t call them into mine. I went to them and tried to find the root of their complaint. I listened to them. I asked questions. And I listened some more. And then I spent time explaining the history of our organization and that we exist to serve the university. And I would walk through with them the vision of what it would take for us to go to the next level and show how their particular issue fit into that.”

“Did it work?” Having been through this many times, I needed to know.

“Yes, but it took lots of one-on-one conversations to turn the corner. If I had it to do over again, I would have taken more time to get feedback. I would take a year and have a team study our history and the core values that have defined this university. Then I would ask them to cast a vision into the future to set a goal and vision for what our organization could become.

I have learned over the years that it’s not my job to get people to perform. It’s my job to inspire them with the greatness of our organization. It is out of that inspiration that servant leadership and hard work is birthed.

Service is one of the core values of A&M. That’s what it means to be an Aggie. That’s what I strive for; and I hope it’s a value I can pass on to those with whom I have influence.”

With that statement, I knew I had more information than I would be able to process in the short time before my next interview. My brain was full and I was deeply inspired. Action that is anchored in our core values and history, serving the organization, inspirational leadership; these thoughts are going to rattle around in my head for quite some time.

So, I began to pack up my stuff, and after a short conversation about the best Bar-B-Q in town, I expressed my thanks for his time and headed out to the car.

I came to A&M hoping to discover the systematic steps used to create the Aggie culture. I then hoped to be able to leverage that knowledge to help shape the culture at our church and enable us to influence the community. But what I discovered was that I was starting on the wrong end. Rather than imposing culture on the church, I need to discover what is already unique about us.⁶ I need to cultivate our unique strengths and our core values and link every action back to them.

I got into my car and headed across campus. Only this time, I launched the GPS on my phone, and it almost worked—I only missed one turn.

My next interview was with Dr. Michael Hitt. What’s funny is that the only reason I called Dr. Hitt is that I picked his name out of a list of the business school professors. I figured one of them would understand my project and could help me figure out whom to interview at the university. I didn’t realize that Dr. Hitt is one of the top strategic management experts in the country. While

his office wasn't as impressive as Porter's, and you couldn't see out of his window because of an immense stack of books, my time with him was no less profound.

The Strength of Identity – Interview with Dr. Michael Hitt

Dr. Michael Hitt is currently a distinguished professor of management at the A&M Mays Business School. Dr. Hitt has co-authored or co-edited 26 books and authored or co-authored more journal articles than I can count. A recent article listed him as one of the ten most cited authors in management over a 25-year period, and he is the current co-editor of the *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*.⁷ Suffice it to say, it was an extreme privilege to spend some time with him.

I found Dr. Hitt in his office on the fourth floor of the Wehner Building. He didn't have an administrative assistant, there wasn't any mahogany on anything and, come to think of it, no one offered me a bottle of water. What he did offer was profound insight into concepts I thought I already knew.

After introducing myself and thanking Dr. Hitt for his time, I politely rearranged a stack of papers on the edge of his desk and opened my laptop. After a quick explanation about the nature of my project, I decided to dive right in to the strategy questions.

"What pivotal events from the past few years do you think have had the greatest impact on the culture of A&M?"

He looked out the window (actually at the stack of books in front of his window) and thought for a moment... "Probably when they moved from all-military and let women in; this had the greatest threat to the culture."

Are you kidding me?! History again?

"The second time would be in the 60s when John Connally was governor. The Texas state legislature officially renamed the school Texas A&M University, with the 'A' and 'M' being a symbolic link to the school as an agricultural and mechanical school. This was significant because it raised the bar for the school and meant more change was needed.

But they didn't want to lose the values and culture associated with their military heritage. The military culture was then maintained through traditions and core values that were used to inculcate new students.

They would spend an inordinate amount of time talking about what it means to be an Aggie. Core values like honesty and integrity are still taught strongly. But one of the biggest contributors to the strength of the culture is the Aggie ring.

Oh yeah, the senior ring is given great importance and it's usually worn for life. When an alumnus sees an Aggie ring on someone, there's an instant connection—a strong connection is built up over the years and it instantly bonds strangers for the rest of an Aggie's life."

Hoping to get a little more insight into the traditions at A&M I asked Dr. Hitt, "What specific strategic steps or processes are in place to ensure the strength and continuation of the Aggie culture?"

“Probably their focus on identity. This is why the senior ring is so important. They are always talking about what it means to be an Aggie. The values and traditions that support their values are woven into the Aggie identity.”

I still wanted to know what strategy they used to create the culture, so I pushed a little.

“But what do they do? What are the tangible, intentional actions in place? How do traditions like the bonfire help?”

He looked at me a little confused, or maybe he was just thinking I was a little thick.

“I think you’re coming at this wrong. The traditions of A&M didn’t create the culture; they were birthed out of the culture. Because the core values from our history are so strong, the school has fought to preserve them. It’s that commitment to our values that has strengthened the organizational culture and created such a strong cultural identity. It’s more like they identified what was already there rather than created it. The traditions you mentioned—the elephant walk, 12th man and the bugle call are actually celebrations of what Aggies are. Sure, they are extremely beneficial in culture preservation, but that’s not why they exist.”

I really wanted Dr. Hitt to help me bridge the gap between A&M's practices and their application to the church in its own culture and in influencing others, so I asked him what he believed were the greatest threats to the A&M culture.

He thought for a few seconds and said, “I really don’t think there are any.”

“What?!”

“No, really. The system is so strong and the culture here is so firmly rooted in our core values and our past that I really can’t see any threats.”

I kept pushing and he finally conceded, “It would take the governor appointing a Board of Regents with no affinity to the culture of A&M, who would then hire a president who didn’t understand or care about the culture, for things to change. Even then, I don’t think that would work because that president wouldn’t last very long.”

“So you’re saying that nothing, since they quit being all-military, has even come close?”

“The only thing that even closely resembles a threat was the significant growth we have experienced over the past 20 years. Rapid growth, combined with increase in faculty and a growing international presence has somewhat diluted the culture at times, but A&M quickly recovered.”

“So why do you think it is so strong? Is there anything besides just the traditions connected to the core values?”

“It’s that, sure. But what makes it even stronger is the identity that has developed around it. These things are all tied to what it means to be an Aggie. In the process a very strong cultural identity has developed that makes Aggies not only loyal to the school but extremely loyal to each other.”

Now we're getting somewhere. "So how do you see that continuing?"

"In 2000, the university president formed a team that formulated a strategic initiative (Vision 2020) that would take A&M from being one of the best schools in the state to one of the best in the nation. They crafted 12 Imperatives that would propel A&M forward in terms of excellence, faculty and growth, among other things. They no longer wanted to be one of the best in Texas. They wanted to be listed among schools like Harvard, Yale and Berkley. This was significant because it forced this current generation to address the necessity to preserve culture during growth and change. This created tension among alums on how to grow and maintain core values."

This was significant to me because I am facing that right now with the growth of our church. With any organization, an increase in size tends to affect culture. Increasing size often leads to greater bureaucratic control, which may produce more consistent behavior patterns, but less creative expression.⁸

"So what did they do?"

"I'm not sure about everything they did, but one thing I saw was an increased focus on identity. Growth can dilute the culture, so they strengthened it by talking even more about what it means to be an Aggie. Right now, the culture is so strong because it is rooted in their history, core values and the continual reinforcement of those values in the Aggie identity.

However, this growth initiative brought with it tension. Of course, tension with change is a good thing. The Vision 2020 team had people saying to them 'Why do we want to grow?' 'I don't want to be like those liberal schools!' As if being listed in the same sentence with a school from up north or California meant you were liberal. But the team faced it, and they faced it head on. They had lots of individual meetings as well as town hall meetings, and they continually reassured people that they were just as committed to the core values of A&M as they ever were and that would never change."

"So did it work?"

"I would say it did. Those that were concerned were impressed that things had been thought through and that the Vision 2020 team took time to hear them out. But it wasn't until Robert Gates was president that it became very clear that they had been heard and action was indeed being taken.

Gates found a way to add 450 new faculty in four years. This reduced class size and improved our ability to interact with the students. Some worried about bringing in that many new faculty members, but he was very clear about what kind of people they would hire, and it has actually improved the university's ability to maintain a strong culture. One of A&M's distinctives is our small town feel even though we are a large school. That has not diminished."

Wow. To say I've gained a lot of insight would be an understatement. I had already taken up way too much of Dr. Hitt's time, so I began to pack up my stuff. We chatted for a few minutes about some of his writing and my struggles to keep up with mine. He asked about my church and where I saw this project going, and he told me of his church involvement. Like Porter, he asked how my daughter was doing in school and what she was studying. And then he offered to help if

she needed anything. These guys *are* Aggies after all. Once again I thanked him and headed out to my car.

The culture at Texas A&M is virtually bullet-proof because it is anchored in their history and their core values. The “traditions” that everyone is so proud of never changing were actually birthed out of those core values. They, in turn, support and preserve the organizational culture. In addition, according to Dr. Hitt, the sustainability of the Aggie culture is under no real threat either. Each time there was even a hint of a threat, the culture was so reinforced that it became part of their very identity: “This is what it means to be an Aggie.”

Analysis

Four themes surfaced during these interviews. First, strong cultures are anchored in strong *core values*. Second, every church has a godly *heritage* that must be celebrated regularly. Third, for a culture to remain strong, there must be tangible *reminders* (artifacts) of the values on which the culture is built. Fourth, those cultures are then preserved when they are linked to *identity*.

Strong Core Values

An organization’s culture is only as strong as the values it is based on. The A&M culture is strong because the values it is based on are strong. Their culture is anchored in rock solid values like honesty, service and integrity. Those will last. To strengthen a culture, you must strengthen the values. Or to put it another way, strong values lead to a strong culture, weak values lead to a weak culture.

In the church, what you value must be raised up, taught about, and celebrated on a regular basis.⁹ Each of us needs to move our core values off of a piece of paper and into the fabric of our lives. Too often we spend countless hours wordsmithing a core values document, then hang it on a wall. Rather than lapsing into “marketing mode,” leaders need to focus on living out and intentionally communicating the core values to those they serve. Whenever we cease to live the values we say we believe in, we destroy that culture and create one that’s less inspiring, less transformational, and less authentic.¹⁰

According to writer Jim Collins, enduring organizations have two dominant characteristics that are complementary opposites. The first is a strong conviction about core ideals that never change; these are purpose and values. The second is a clear understanding that everything else must change in order to preserve the core.¹¹ The fascinating observation is that by discerning the core ideology and distinguishing it from what is noncore, a leader can free people to embrace change by connecting their identity to the core ideals that never change.¹²

This is how A&M can be a cutting edge university while an older generation declares that nothing ever changes. If an organization can anchor its culture in strong core values—values it can be proud of—then it will become both immovable and flexible. Both my interviews with Porter Garner and Dr. Hitt revealed that A&M’s commitment to their core values is pivotal to their strong organizational culture.

Celebrate Your Heritage

In the church, we need to learn to celebrate our heritage. Especially as the old hymns are not sung as much (and I refuse to let that become a moral debate), we need to find ways to celebrate our past and pass on a respect for our past to the next generation.

In his book, *Axioms*, Bill Hybels tells a story about a thousand-year-old cathedral he visited in Durham, England. One of the guys traveling with him asked what he would do if he was appointed bishop. Hybels responded:

Well, I'll tell you what I wouldn't do. I wouldn't trot out some new vision my first week on the job. That would be pastoral suicide! I'd study the history of that congregation until I knew it better than anyone in the place. Then I would affirm every praiseworthy part of that history. It might take months to accomplish, but so be it. Only after everyone knew that I valued the past would I begin to infuse the people with the DNA that I felt would take us into a God-glorifying future.¹³

One of the traditions I love at A&M is the "Bugle Call." The "Bugle Call" celebrates Aggie fans who have extraordinary Aggie spirit and have been demonstrating that passion for an extraordinarily long time. During every home game they show a video of that person (usually a person of advanced years) and honor them, their life, and their commitment to the university. Thousands of students don't realize it, but they are learning to honor and respect age, experience and wisdom.

Nothing communicates like a good story. What stories could be told of your church's past, or from church history, that would support and strengthen the values you are trying to communicate? If you were fighting for which stories belong in your church's Hall of Fame, which ones would make the top three? If your ministry had a shoebox of memorabilia, which objects would be in it? What were the two biggest defining moments in the ministry's history? What happened and how did the event shape the character of the organization?¹⁴ The answers to these questions will provide you with stories to tell and events to celebrate that will go a long way toward the discovery and strengthening of your culture.

Cultural Artifacts

Cultural artifacts include all that one sees, hears, and feels when they encounter an organization. They include items such as its building architecture, its language, its technology and products, its artistic creations, its style, its published list of values (if any), its observable rituals and ceremonies, and so on.¹⁵ This would include the traditions at A&M. Their "artifacts" are represented not only in the architecture of the buildings, but more deeply in the stories they tell, the various traditions and sayings such as the "Aggie Code," and, of course, the Aggie ring. As was pointed out in both interviews, while artifacts do not create culture, they are crucial in communicating, strengthening and sustaining culture.

"Tradition" has become a negative word in some church circles, but it doesn't have to be that way. It may be beneficial to examine various practices that are becoming tradition within your church and how they support your values. It may be possible that you can institute some traditions that don't change and keep them infused with life by continually linking them to your core values.

Cultural Identity

Organizational culture can be defined as the set of values, norms, guiding beliefs, and understandings that are shared by members of an organization and taught to its new members. This culture provides members with a sense of organizational identity and generates in them a commitment to beliefs and values that are larger than themselves.¹⁶ An emphasis on identity personalizes the commitment to the organization's mission and values. When a person internalizes the core values of a group, not only is the group strengthened, but the sustainability of the values and goals of the group are strengthened. The sustaining power of A&M's culture is that they can connect their history and values to one phrase: "This is what it means to be an Aggie."

Our values must become part of who we are. We must live them and we must communicate them. Each church must discover what makes them unique. They must identify the core values that define them, and they must work to anchor their culture in those values. Those values must be taught, talked about and celebrated regularly. Stories need to be told that support the values. Traditions, rituals, and even architecture all need to reflect the values and culture of the church. They must be so ingrained in the fabric of the church that they become part of the church's identity.

Conclusion

If your church is really going to engage in culture influence, it must be prepared to take a long-term approach. You've got to get rid of the microwave mentality and ignore the quick-fix programs that abound and, working from the inside out, grow your culture into what God has created it to be. This approach will help to create a culture that is your own. Then, if you drift, your church's own strong culture will pull you safely back.¹⁷

The culture of a church must be embedded into all decisions, staff recruiting, resource allocation, staff and volunteer evaluations, the evaluation of services and other programs, etc. The stories that are told, the systems that are put into place, and the organizational structure are just as important as teaching and formal statements. In fact, the leader's commitment to and living of the church's culture may very well be more important than any formal statements or communications.

If we are going to influence culture, Christians must become Incarnational. An incarnational mindset focuses on living and sharing the gospel "where life happens."¹⁸ We have to enter into even the most toxic of cultures and demonstrate "what it means to be a Christian." Somehow, we have to raise this value high. For too long, the rallying cry of the church has been "Come to us!" Jesus demonstrated the exact opposite. He became a man, lived as a servant, and gave His life. We must quit saying "Come to us" and instead, go to them.

Becoming a church that is incarnational means moving from being served to serving, from finding community in the church to impacting the community as the church, from retreating to influencing, from isolation to engagement.¹⁹ According to Andy Crouch, the only way to change culture is to create more of it. Cultural change will only happen when something new displaces, to some extent, existing culture in a very tangible way.²⁰

When an organization takes a foundation of strong core values, integrates them into their cultural identity, and reflects them in their artifacts, the result will be a strong, positive culture. The

church needs to identify, communicate and celebrate its core values in such a way that they become part of their culture. As those values are internalized by church members, they will become part of the people's identity. This will, in turn, strengthen the church, but it will also strengthen the people so that they will become a positive influence in whatever culture they find themselves.

Transformed culture is at the heart of God's mission in the world, and it is the call of God's redeemed people.²¹ God has ordained churches and has given them the power to transform communities for the Kingdom. Yet, with each passing year, it seems they become increasingly irrelevant. However, when a church's culture is strong, becoming part of its identity, then that church is poised to participate in God's transformation process.

"This is what it means to be a Christian."

About the Author

Steve Lawson is the senior pastor of Grace Community Church in Greenville, Texas, and a Doctor of Strategic Leadership student at Regent University. His church and business leadership competencies are based on practical experience as a small business owner and senior pastor. He currently holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of North Texas, as well as a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from The King's College and Seminary, and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Amberton University. Questions about this article can be directed to the author via email at: steve@graceweb.net.

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